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ABSTRACT

Using 437 interviews with apprentices and trainees, teachers/trainers, and supervisors/managers, a study explored retention in apprenticeships and traineeships and factors that influence it. Apprentices and trainees were more likely to complete their contract of training (COT) if they developed an interest in the occupation and had medium- and long-term goals in the occupation, a high level of personal maturity, and support of family/friends/partner; the qualification they were undertaking was perceived to be valuable in the public domain; few alternatives in the occupational area offered better rewards to those without qualifications; they could access resources to cope with changes in personal and workplace circumstances; they developed and used a wide range of skills and knowledge; work hours and demands were realistic and reasonable; work physical conditions were not too onerous; interpersonal relationships were satisfying; management and supervision were supportive; COT length was commensurate with future rewards; there was a high level of integration within the training program; trainers/teachers were seen as experienced in the industry, efficient, and supportive; the COT had some flexibility; all parties recognized and valued the skills and knowledge developed over the COT; and they were supported to develop persistence during training. Possible

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interventions to enhance retention were suggested. (Appendixes include 36 references, interview schedule, and demographic data on interviewees.) (YLB)

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NCVER Australian Apprenticeships

Factors that contribute to retention and completion rates for apprentices and trainees

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Executive summary

This study explored retention in apprenticeships and traineeships and the factors that influence this process. Substantial reforms to entry-level training policies have produced significant increases in the number of apprentices and trainees and a concomitant increase in the number of cancellations and withdrawals from training programs. The objectives of this research, therefore, were to identify and describe factors that underlie the process of retention, analyse those most amenable to change and examine a number of interventions that could be used to enhance retention and contribute to increased completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. The focus on retention in this study is concerned with the mechanisms that over time increase the likelihood of completion.

A qualitative research approach was taken in the study. Interviews enabled a close exploration of the factors that contribute to retention and completion within various occupational groups. In total, 437 interviews were held with apprentices and trainees (both those who had recently completed and those who were currently completing a contract of training), teachers/trainers and supervisors/managers.

As apprentices and trainees progress through the training system, there are factors or circumstances pertaining to their on-the-job and off-the job training environments that play a major role in determining whether they complete or not. On- and off-job learning environments that enhance the process of retention are those that:

- have a positive climate that is supportive of apprentices' and trainees' learning
- are 'adult like'
- sustain positive relationships between apprentices/trainees and their teachers / trainers
- provide high quality teaching/training
- use high quality learning materials
- provide flexible and relevant learning opportunities.

The process of retention is a dynamic one. The factors that affect the likelihood of an apprentice or trainee completing their contract of training vary over time. There are very few apprentices and trainees who do not consider leaving their contract of training at some point in time. The types of interventions that assist the newly appointed apprentice or trainee to commit to their contract of training differ from those needed to encourage an apprentice or trainee in their final months of training. In this sense every apprentice/trainee is unique, both in terms of the difficulties they might face and the strengths that they bring to their particular situation. The study also highlighted how the process of retention varies across occupational groups. A major finding of this research is that the process of retention can only be understood within the context of a particular occupational situation.

Some factors that influence the process of retention and the outcome of completion are relatively stable over time and are not easily changed (for example, the age at which an apprentice/trainee commences a contract of training). Other factors are more dynamic and open to change.

The factors that influence of process of retention are also inter-related and cumulative. Many apprentices and trainees spoke of having to bear one or two negative aspects (poor wages, difficulties with study) over the period of their contract of training. These circumstances could be coped with, provided there was support and the promise of improvements and rewards in the not-too-distant future. But there were circumstances

where added negatives and the deterioration of the long-term 'pay offs' (for example, a decline in demand in the labour market for a particular occupation) no longer seemed to make it worth persisting the current situation.

Based on the data from this study, apprentices and trainees are more likely to complete their contract of training if the following conditions are present.

Personal

- They have developed an interest in the occupation (for example, via work experience, pre-vocational courses)
- they have medium and long-term goals for themselves in the occupation
- they have a high level of personal maturity
- they have the support of family/friends/partner
- they have taken into consideration other demands on their time and energy (family, sport, friends, etc.)

Industry/labour market

- the qualification they are undertaking is perceived to be valuable in the public domain
- there are few alternatives in the occupational area offering better rewards to those without qualifications

'Accidental'

- the trainee/apprentice is able to access resources to cope with changes in personal circumstances (relationships, pregnancy, injury, shifting house – especially long distances, car breakdown, etc.)
- the trainee/apprentice is able to access resources to cope with changes in workplace circumstances (retrenchment, closure, take over, etc.)

Workplace

- the trainee/apprentice is able to develop and use a wide range of skills and knowledge
- hours and demands of work are realistic and reasonable
- physical conditions of work are not too onerous
- interpersonal relationships are satisfying
- management and supervision are supportive.

Training

- the length of the contract of training is commensurate with its future rewards
- there is a high level of integration within the training program, both in terms of on- and off-job environments and linkages between different levels of qualifications providing a career/learning pathway
- the trainers/teachers are seen to be experienced in the industry, efficient and supportive

- there is some flexibility in the contract of training (for example, so that the apprentice/trainee can be relocated to another workplace if necessary)

Outcomes

- all parties (apprentices/trainees, managers/supervisors, teachers/trainers) recognise and value the skills and knowledge developed over the contract of training
- apprentices/trainees are supported to develop persistence over the time they are in training.

The report concludes with suggestions on possible interventions that may be used to enhance the process of retention in traineeships and apprenticeships. The major criteria for selecting any intervention to enhance retention need to take into account:

- the occupational context in which it might be implemented, and
- the degree to which it addresses those factors affecting the process of retention that are most amenable to change within that context.

Retention is the collective responsibility of all parties involved in vocational education and training. The commitment to complete an apprenticeship or traineeship does not reside solely within the individual apprentice or trainee. Retention is enhanced by institutional processes which are responsive, learner-centred and acknowledge the unique needs and circumstances of apprentices and trainees and the contexts in which they live and work. Retention is one of the products of quality partnerships between apprentices/trainees, their employer(s) and the registered training organisations with whom they work.

Introduction

Apprenticeships have a long history of serving traditional trade areas in Australia. Supported by well developed institutional arrangements amongst unions, education providers, state regulatory authorities and industries, apprenticeships have provided a small number of largely male-dominated industries with a system of entry-level training that has remained almost unchanged for nearly one hundred years (Gospel cited in Dandie 1996; NCVER 1998, p. 2).

Since the 1980s, however, this system of entry-level training has undergone substantial changes in response to a range of factors including:

- changing skill requirements of industry as a result of technological change and industrial restructuring
- growing employer calls for increased flexibility and responsiveness which take account of the changing context in which enterprises are operating (increased competition and concern for the 'bottom line', casualisation of workforce, emphasis on specialisation)
- increased dissatisfaction with trade training based on notions of time-serving and acquiring knowledge rather that the development of competent workers
- changes in the demographic profiles of young people entering apprenticeships
- changes in policy directions which shifted greater responsibility for the provision of entry-level training to industry in order to increase the quantum and quality of training needed to ensure Australia's global competitiveness (Saunders 1999; Ray & Associates 1999).

These changes have resulted in a range of policy responses including the introduction of traineeships in 1985 and, more recently, the development of *New Apprenticeships*. These reforms have aimed at strengthening employment-based training arrangements, with the ultimate goal of producing a high quality and flexible system which will meet the increasingly diverse needs of Australian industry while also providing a pathway into employment, particularly for young people (ANTA 1997, p.1; NCVER 1998, p.2). One of the outcomes of these reforms has been a significant increase in the numbers of apprentices and trainees in Australia and a concomitant increase in the number of cancellations and withdrawals from training programs (NCVER 1998, p.2).

Research on attrition and completion rates has a long history in the vocational education and training sector (for example Siedel 1972; Sumner 1974; Brown & Dwyer 1984; Macdonald 1984). Interest in the issue continued into the 1990s (Taylor 1990; Mill 1991; Streckfuss & Waters 1990; Misko 1997; Mulvey 1999; Uren 1999), along with a concern over quality in apprenticeships and traineeships (WADOT 1998, Schofield 1999a, 1999b & 2000, Smith 1999, 2000) or labour market outcomes (Cully et al. 2000). It is important to note, however, that many of these studies have not concentrated on the *process of retention* but have chosen instead to examine issues relating to attrition and wastage.

Within the current policy context, however, the process of retention and the completion of contracts of training assume a greater complexity. Registered training organisations are increasingly accountable to their State/Territory Training Authorities with regard to the number of module and program completions. Such measures are used as indicators of performance and funding is increasingly tied to these indicators.

Under *New Apprenticeships*, employers, apprentices and trainees can now select from a diversity of developmental pathways that use various combinations of on- and off-the-job training with a range of training providers. Trainees and apprentices can be employed either directly by an enterprise or access on-job training via a group training scheme.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are no longer solely confined to young people entering the workforce for the first time. Apprentices and trainees can be drawn from existing workforces within an enterprise or from persons who have had a range of experience within the workforce prior to making a commitment to a contract of training.

In short, there is a range of factors — personal, demographic, structural, economic, educational, political and environmental — which, either individually or through a series of interrelationships, may influence the process of retention and hence the completion of a traineeship or apprenticeship.

Purpose, objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the range of factors that contribute to high retention in, and successful completion of, apprenticeships and traineeships.

The three key objectives of the study were to:

- identify and describe factors that underlie the process of retention
- examine the factors that are most amenable to change so as to increase retention and completion
- examine a number of interventions that could be used to enhance retention and contribute to increased completion of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Some of the research issues that guided the exploration of these objectives included:

a) cancellations and withdrawals from apprenticeships and traineeships

- what is the extent of cancellations and withdrawals from apprenticeships and traineeships across occupational groupings?

b) nature of factors that contribute to successful completion of apprenticeships and traineeships

- what factors contribute to successful completion of apprenticeships and traineeships and how might these factors be interrelated?
- how do these factors and their impact vary across a range of occupational groups?

c) patterns of retention between various client groups and the factors underpinning these patterns

- what patterns of retention can be discerned between various client groups across a number of occupational groups?
- what factors are contributing to these observed patterns of retention?

d) factors most amenable to bringing about improved retention and increased completion for identified client groups

- which factors might be most amenable to change and what strategies/interventions have already been pursued to promote increases in retention and completion?
- which strategies/interventions have been most successful in promoting retention and completion and how applicable are these actions across a range of occupations, qualification types, learning pathways, client groups?

e) implications of the research

- what are the implications of the findings for policy, employers, training providers, parents and future apprentices and trainees?

Review of the literature

Entry-level training policies are directed towards providing training for people entering the workforce and promoting achievement of qualifications up to and including Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 4 (Lundberg 1997, p.3). Apprenticeships and traineeships are a key component of government policies aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of entry-level training and have been the focus of considerable change and debate during the implementation of training reform over the last ten years. The first part of this review focuses on these changes and how they have impacted on the purposes of apprenticeships and traineeships. The second part examines recent Australian research on non-completion in apprenticeships and traineeships before examining research on completion and non-completion from the adult education literature.

The purposes of traineeships and apprenticeships

Since their inception in 1985 the purpose of traineeships has varied over time. Initially under the Australian Traineeship System, young people aged 15 – 19 who had not completed Year 12 were given preference. The major goal of this policy initiative was to support the development of diverse training pathways for young people, particularly in the non-trades areas (DETYA 1999, p.7). This focus soon shifted to include people of all ages. In 1994, the instigation of the National Training Wage provided the mechanism by which traineeships could be expanded to cover a wider range of industries.

Apprenticeships, in contrast, have a long history of serving traditional trade areas in Australia. Supported by well-developed institutional arrangements among unions, education providers, state regulatory authorities and industries, apprenticeships have provided a small number of largely male dominated industries with a system of entry-level training which has remained almost unchanged for nearly one hundred years (Gospel cited in Dandie 1996; NCVER 1998, p.2).

Traineeships and apprenticeships, therefore, can been seen to serve a number of related and somewhat competing policy objectives relating to entry into the labour market generally and, more specifically, entry into an occupation. Apprenticeships would appear to place a greater emphasis on the development of vocational skills, whereas it could be argued that traineeships, particularly in their current form, are part of an overall policy strategy to stimulate the creation of jobs, particularly in new and emerging industries.

Both are based on a contractual relationship and the formation and maintenance of social relationships between the individual apprentice or trainee and employer for the duration of the contract of training. As a contractual relationship, apprenticeships and traineeships provide both parties with specific benefits. For apprentices and trainees, the contract of training provides a guaranteed period of employment, during which there is the opportunity to learn a range of skills relating to an occupation. There are also opportunities to learn about being a 'worker' and what it means to maintain one's position in the workplace. For employers, the contract of training provides the opportunity to be involved in the skill formation process for their particular industry and the benefits of increased productivity from the apprentice or trainee over time. Employers are supported for their efforts via access to subsidised wages for the apprentice or trainee for the period of the contract of training.

One of the key differences between apprenticeships and traineeships is the emphasis placed on skill formation. Within apprenticeships there is an expectation of a 'skill formation process', whereas traineeships are often seen as primarily providing employment pathways (WADOT 1998, p.v). Traineeships are often viewed as having a

'lower' status than apprenticeships with a higher concentration of effort in providing a pathway into the world of work (Ray and Associates 1999, p.29).

While strong support for apprenticeships and traineeships remains, some authors have raised a number of issues relating to their efficacy as forms of entry-level training, including:

- the willingness and capacity of enterprises to enter into extended commitments to training within a context of increased pressures from economic and industry restructuring and growing competitiveness, and
- the impact of the changing demographic and skill profile of the applicant pool (Keating 1995, p. 23; Marshman and Associates 1996; Sweet 1998, p.6).

Research on the traineeship systems in Queensland and Tasmania has highlighted concerns about the apparent conflicting purposes of traineeships as mechanisms for reducing unemployment on the one hand, and as a skill formation process on the other (Schofield 1999, p.4). At the heart of these issues is the capacity of the vocational education and training system to provide apprentices and trainees with high quality learning pathways that will enable them to successfully complete their contracts of training.

Whilst the issue of non-completion is not at the core of this research study, an examination of the recent research into this issue provides a view of 'the other side of the coin' in relation to the process of retention and completion as an outcome.

Completion and non-completion in traineeships and apprenticeships

Traineeships

Since traineeships commenced in 1985, non-completion has remained at around 40% with a clearly demonstrable upward climb over the period of the last few years. Current estimates for the year 1997 suggest that the non-completion rate will be of the order of 45% (DETYA 1999, p.10). It is important to note, however, that this rate is of the same order as the rate of separation from those permanent jobs that may be considered to be similar to traineeships (DETYA 1999, p.1).

The rate of non-completion of traineeships is affected by a number of factors (DETYA 1999). These include:

- the nature of the traineeship — those traineeships that allow for training to be completed entirely on-the job appear to have higher rates of non-completion than those that have an integrated model of training (that is, a combination of on- and off-job training)
- the type of traineeship — in the two year period 1995-1996, non-completion rates of over 50% occurred in small business, automotive, food/meat processing and construction worker categories
- particular personal characteristics of the trainee — specifically, trainees who have low levels of educational attainment and who were unemployed prior to commencing their traineeship appear to be most at risk of non-completion.

It is also important to note that just over one half (55%) of non-completions were the result of trainees leaving employment voluntarily (DETYA 1999, p.29). Issues such as low wages, being in receipt of insufficient training and poor relations with employers were seen to contribute to the decision to leave (DETYA 1999, p.32).

A study undertaken in Western Australia revealed similar trends in attrition rates for traineeships in that state. The overall attrition rate for the state in the period 1996 – 1997 was 39%. Attrition rates were highest for trainees who were undertaking the small

business traineeship, were aged 23 or over, male and who had completed Year 11 as their highest level of education (WADTE 1999. pp.57-63). One third of trainees left their traineeship having completed over six months. Eleven percent of non-completers left within one month of commencing their contract of training and a further 25% left within the first three months (WADTE 1999, p.45). The major reasons for leaving the traineeship included (ibid, p.46):

- employer ended the traineeship
- poor relationships with employer and other staff
- lack of training
- lack of work
- employer went out of business
- perceived exploitation
- poor work environment
- too much work
- lack of career prospects

Another significant finding from this study relates to the motivation for undertaking a traineeship and how this impacts on the decision to leave before completing the contract of training. Specifically,

> *Trainees who completed the traineeship were more likely to have been motivated by a desire to acquire skills than those who did not complete. Alternatively, those who did not complete were more likely to have been motivated by want of a job or income* (WADTE 1999, p.20)

Apprenticeships

Non-completion (or attrition) in apprenticeships has been noted to be lower than that for traineeships (Vallence 1997 cited in WADTE 1999). One estimate puts the non-completion rate for apprentices at less that 30% compared with the figures of approximately 40-45% for traineeships that were cited above (WADTE 1999, p.ii).

A study conducted by DETYA used data from the records of 81,702 apprentices for the period 1994 – 1997 to estimate the attrition rate (defined as when an apprentice leaves and does not recommence within a two-year period). This rate was found to be between 23 - 30% over the four-year period of an apprenticeship. Attrition was found to be highest within the first three months of an apprenticeship (DETYA 2000, p.3).

The authors of the DETYA report caution against the use of comparisons between the attrition rate from apprenticeships and the non-completion of traineeships. They suggest that the contract of training for an apprentice during the period of their research was substantially different from those for traineeships in that it is more legally binding. This, they assume, would have an impact on the amount of effort that may be made in assisting an apprentice to complete their contract in the event of an employer being unable to meet their obligations (DETYA 2000, p.17). They also make the point that prior to the introduction of *New Apprenticeships* a number of other factors added to the differentiation between apprenticeships and traineeships which are significant when considering the relative rates of non-completion for these two types of entry level training. These factors include:

- significantly different administrative arrangements underpinning their provision (for example, greater allowance is made for recommencements in apprenticeships
- the differing skill levels of traineeships (typically equivalent to AQF 2) and apprenticeships (usually AQF 3 or 4) which attract a significantly different population in demographic and institutional terms (DETYA 2000, p.18).

As with traineeships, a range of factors was found to affect the likelihood that an apprentice would not complete his or her contract of training. Higher attrition rates were also linked to the apprentice's prior education level, with higher attrition levels for those who had not completed Year 12. Male gender and increasing age were also found to increase the rate of attrition (DETYA 2000, p.26). Surprisingly, this study also found that apprentices employed in group training schemes were more likely *not* to complete their contract of training when compared with apprentices employed in the private sector and with other organisations (DETYA 2000, p.34).

While rates of non-completion and attrition can provide some insight into the extent of the problems that might face those interested in examining the process of retention, these types of studies are focused on factors linked to events, that is, they attempt to be predictive. Retention, on the other hand, is a process that has as its outcome the event of completion. The focus on retention in this study is concerned with the mechanisms that over time enhance the likelihood of completion.

Factors affecting observed outcomes in adult education

The issue of factors affecting the outcomes of training and education programs occupies a significant amount of space within the adult education literature. Although not directly concerned with apprenticeships and traineeships, it is nonetheless instructive in the search for frameworks within which to examine the range of factors that could potentially impact on completion of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Research studies on attrition in adult education programs have taken several complementary foci. Dirkx and Jha (1994, p.270) suggest that these studies can be grouped into a number of categories:

- *Motivational* studies which focus on participants' reasons for leaving programs,
- *Contextual and cultural* studies which aim to place attrition in the broader context through an examination of 'barriers' (Beder 1991) or 'deterrents' (Scanlan and Darkenwald 1984),
- *Past life experiences* studies which particularly emphasise the experiences of early schooling in determining attrition (Cervero and Kirkpatrick 1990), and
- *Program-focused* studies that examine a range of program attributes such as instructional activities and curricula content.

Research from the field of human resource management points to the impact that various factors operating in the workplace can have on participant retention in training programs. Vann and Hinton (1994) note that the workplace is a "formal social organisation" which will necessarily impact on participant learning in the workplace. They use the outcomes of a study to examine the retention rates for participants in General Educational Development (GED) programs across 14 sites in the USA to illustrate this point. These programs were located in enterprises in the food processing industry. Employees were encouraged to participate in the programs via a system of cash incentives. Vann and Hinton found that those participants who completed the programs were more likely to have supportive workplace networks (that is, belong to a 'clique' or group) than those who were more socially isolated in the workplace (Vann and Hinton 1994, p.149). Further, this research found that those participants who were most likely to succeed in the program had reference groups where people had higher or similar levels of education. In other words, the reference groups reinforce the value of learning (Vann and Hinton 1994, p.150).

A recent study of attrition rates in training courses for the US Airforce highlighted the impact of low motivation on attrition rates from training. Observed high rates of attrition were attributed to the mandatory nature of the training and the unattractiveness of the jobs to be performed post-course by the trainees (Ree and Carretta 1999, p.170).

Figure 1: Components of the Adult Persistence in Learning (APIL) model

Component	Factors
Personal issues	***Self awareness:*** personality characteristics and qualities (confidence, a sense that they can learn, can cope with the demands of their apprenticeship/traineeship, knowledge of personal strengths and deficits) that help apprentices and trainees to negotiate the demands of learning in one or a number of learning environments. ***Willingness to delay gratification:*** a belief that the apprenticeship and traineeship is of value both to themselves and within the wider community. This belief can assist apprentices and trainees to cope with issues such as low wages and to juggle pressures that arise from multiple responsibilities as a worker and a learner. ***Clarification of career or life goals:*** being clear about what goals, expectations and what exactly it will take to succeed; a long-term view that an apprenticeship or traineeship will contribute to career goals. ***Mastery of life transitions:*** responding to the large and small turning points that can occur throughout the life of an apprentice/trainee. Adapting to these transitions (for example, becoming an apprentice or trainee) can be either stressful or welcomed. Adults sometimes have to balance family responsibilities and relationship transitions. These can tax learners and leave them with little 'head space' and energy for coping with the demands of learning. ***Sense of interpersonal competence:*** being able to cope with the demands of the various learning environments in which apprentices and trainees might find themselves. Apprentices and trainees need to have the confidence to be able to approach staff, ask questions, and seek help and advice as they need.
Learning issues	***Educational competence:*** being able to cope with the demands of being a learner; having a belief that they can learn and deal with negative and positive learning experiences from their past in a way that is productive. ***Intellectual and political competence:*** being able to be realistic about what is required in the different learning environments. This includes apprentices and trainees understanding what they need to do to cope with learning in these environments, whom to approach for help and how to do this. It also involves being able to pick up the 'tips and hints' within the workplace about learning and how it is viewed and to understand how an off-site learning environment might 'work'.
Environmental issues	***Information retrieval:*** Knowing how to get good quality information about what is required in terms of assessment, assignments, practical tasks, etc. and being able to interpret this information accurately. ***Awareness of opportunities and impediments:*** Apprentices and trainees need to be able to understand what might help or hinder them in their learning. They need access to information and support that will make their contract of training as accessible and realistic for them. They may also need support to overcome some of the situational or institutional barriers they may face (for example, Why hasn't the trainer from the RTO come to visit me? How can I contact them?). ***Environmental compatibility:*** Apprentices and trainees need to be able to come to terms with the learning cultures that they might encounter over the period of their training. Learning cultures comprise the range of attitudes and values that an institution/workplace might hold in relation to learners, learning and training and will be demonstrated in the way apprentices and trainees are treated in these environments. It also includes the quality of the resources and materials they are given and the degree to which they match the apprentices'/trainees' learning needs.

Source: Mackinnon-Slaney 1994, pp. 269-273.

The concept of persistence has been used in the adult education literature as a way of describing what is a very complex process which will lead some adults to continue their participation in learning opportunities. This concept would seem to be at the heart of the process of retention. Persistence is defined as a "complicated series of responses to a series of issues confronted by the individual adult in his or her unique situation as a 'universe of one'" (Mackinnon-Slaney 1994, p.269).

Mackinnon-Slaney (1994) developed a model of adult persistence in learning. This model consists of three components, each of which has several factors. These components, modified for the context of this study, are described in Figure 1.

The concept of persistence is a dynamic one. The three components with their various factors can increase or decrease in importance over the period of an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Conclusion

Retention is a process whereby people who enter an apprenticeship or traineeship are supported to remain in their contract of training. Completion is one event that can occur at the end of the contract of training. It is that point in time where an apprentice or trainee leaves the training system with a recognised qualification.

The literature on apprenticeships and traineeships provides some insights into specific variables that may impact on the process of retention. The literature from the field of adult education suggests that a range of factors can contribute to an adult's decision to remain as a learner. These factors can generally be divided into two categories:

- Person-orientated factors. These are particular characteristics of the apprentice/trainee that can often not be easily changed. They, in and of themselves, do not *cause* events such as non-completion. The effects of these factors needs to be accounted for in any discussion on interventions designed to support those apprentices and trainees who might be designated 'at risk' of non-completion or who are in need of special assistance to enhance the process of retention.
- Context-orientated factors. These are factors that make up aspects of the 'life world' of the apprentice/trainee and, in concert with the person-orientated factors, appear to impact on the process of retention.

Figure 2 summarises the factors that can be identified from the literature under these two headings.

Figure 2: Factors from the literature that appear to be linked to the process of retention in traineeships and apprenticeships

Person - orientated factors	Context - orientated factors
• Motivation to undertake a traineeship / apprenticeship (WADTE 1999)	• Type and quality of social networks at work (Vann and Hinton 1994)
• Persistence (Mackinnon-Slaney 1994)	• Type and quality of social networks amongst peers (Vann and Hinton 1994)
• Gender (DETYA 2000)	• Mandatory nature of training (Ree and Carretta 1999)
• Interpersonal relationship with employer (WADTE 1999)	• Nature of work open to trainees/apprentices after they have completed their course (WADTE 1999; Ree and Carretta 1999)
• Age (WADTE 1999)	• Nature of the contract of training (integrated, totally on-the-job)(DETYA 1999)
• Highest level of previous education (DETYA 2000; DETYA 1999)	• Occupational area in which the traineeship/ apprenticeship is being undertaken (DETYA 1999)
• Past life experiences including experiences of earlier schooling (Cervero and Kirkpatrick 1999)	• Productive and meaningful work during the course of the apprenticeship/ traineeship (WADTE 1999)
	• Type of contract of training (apprenticeship or traineeship) (DETYA 2000)
	• Quality of training (DETYA 1999; WADTE 1999)
	• Quality of employment conditions (DETYA 1999; WADTE 1999)
	• Nature of employer (enterprise, group training) (DETYA 2000)

Several observations can be made about this list of factors. First, it is apparent that different factors affect retention and completion in apprenticeships and traineeships. Despite current policy initiatives that encourage a blurring of these two types of entry-level training, the research would indicate that this is not the case. Some factors that appear to impact on completion rates in one form of contract of training do not in the other. Secondly, whilst this list of factors is a useful starting point, what is needed is a greater understanding of the interrelationships *between* these factors. Thirdly, the figure contains a mixture of factors, all of which potentially could impact on the process of retention. For the purposes of designing policy interventions, it is important to be able to distinguish between those factors that are relatively stable over time and those which are more dynamic in nature and, therefore, more amenable to change. For example, level of schooling at commencement of an apprenticeship/traineeship cannot be easily changed. It is usually not possible to return a young person to school. It could be argued, however, that factors related to the quality of on-job training are more amenable to change and hence worthy targets for policy intervention.

These twin foci of the interrelationships between factors that affect the process of retention (and hence completion) of apprenticeships and traineeships and the possible sites for intervention form the core of this present research study.

The research process

The research objectives were addressed using a qualitative approach. Data collection methods were selected that allowed a close exploration of the factors contributing to observed levels of completion and retention for various client groups.

In order to limit the scope of the study, the decision was made to focus on a manageable number of occupations identified in a preliminary analysis of data extracted from the NCVER Trainee and Apprentice Collection. In addition, the study was restricted to five States/Territories – New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. The researchers used the following criteria to focus the research:

- selecting two cases of high completions and two cases of high cancellations/ withdrawals in each of the five participating States/Territory (a total of 20 cases)
- selecting one occupation to study across all five States/Territory, but not more than one to guard against repetition
- selecting occupations which had high completion or high cancellations in two or three states to provide some opportunity to compare and contrast occupations across states (if applicable)
- ensuring that there was a diversity of occupations included in the final list
- balancing as much as was possible the occupations likely to embrace apprenticeships and those likely to embrace traineeships.

Cooks were selected under the second criterion (accounting for five cases), while the following occupations were selected under the third criterion from the lists of 'high' cases (accounting for a further nine cases):

- sales representatives (three States)
- computing technicians
- fabrication engineering tradespersons
- hairdressers.

A number of occupations that met the fourth and fifth criteria were selected to be followed up in a single State/Territory (accounting for another six cases):

- office managers and general clerks
- carpentry and joinery tradespersons
- aircraft maintenance engineers
- storepersons
- farmers
- electrical and telecommunications trades assistants.

Figure 3 indicates the occupations (with their ASCO codes) included in each of the five States/Territory.

Figure 3: Occupations included in the study

State/ Territory	High completions – apprenticeships/traineeships			High withdrawals/cancellations – apprenticeships/traineeships		
	ASCO	Occupation	AQF	ASCO	Occupation	AQF
ACT	3291 6111 4411	Office managers & General clerks Carpentry & joinery tradespersons	II - III II III	4513 6211	Cooks Sales representatives	III II
NSW	4114 412	Aircraft maintenance engineers Fabrication engineering tradespersons	III III	4513 4931	Cooks Hairdressers	III III
South Australia	7993 1311	Storepersons Mixed crop & livestock farmers	II - IV I - III	4513 412	Cooks Fabrication engineering tradespersons	III II - IV
Tasmania	6211 8211 3294	Sales representatives & Sales assistants Computing technicians	II II II	4513 4931	Cooks Hairdressers	III III
Victoria	8211 9918	Sales assistants Electrical and telecommunications assistants	II II	4513 3294	Cooks Computing technicians	III II

Source: Data extracted from the NCVER trainee and apprentice collection

Interviews were held with four different categories of people in each State/Territory within the selected occupations:

- apprentices and trainees who were currently completing a contract of training
- apprentices and trainees who had recently completed their contract of training
- registered training organisation teachers and trainers of apprentices and trainees
- workplace supervisors and managers of apprentices and trainees

Interviewees were obtained through a snowballing process, where initial contact was usually made with a relevant registered training organisation or key enterprise and, from there, contacts were progressively made in other organisations or with individuals. It became evident that it would be very time-consuming following up apprentices/trainees who had cancelled or withdrawn from contracts of training. As another study commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research was specifically focusing on *non-completions* of apprenticeships/traineeships, it was decided that this study's efforts within available time and cost would be best directed at tracking the other categories of learner.

Interviews took whatever form was feasible given the circumstances and contexts (see Appendix A for a sample interview schedule used in this process). Responses were obtained in a variety of ways — by face-to-face individual interviews, telephone individual interviews and group interviews. Telephone interviews were used where distance prohibited face-to-face contact, or where locating interview space within work time or finding time to track down an individual in an out-of-the-way enterprise were problematic.

Table 1 details the number of interviews conducted with each of the four groups, their geographic location and the occupational areas in which they worked. The type of contract of training is also included for apprentices and trainees. In total, 437 people were interviewed in this qualitative study.

Table 1: Interviewees by location, type of contract of training and occupational area

	Apprentices/ trainees who have RECENTLY COMPLETED their contract of training	Apprentices/ trainees who are CURRENTLY UNDERTAKING their contract of training	Teachers/ trainers	Managers/ supervisors
Number of interviews conducted	35	318	51	33
State/Territory:				
SA	6	76	8	10
NSW	6	76	16	9
ACT	10	67	10	10
VIC	1	74	5	4
TAS	12	25	12	-
Type of contract of training:				
Apprenticeship	16	108		
Traineeship	19	210		
Occupational area:				
Aircraft maintenance / avionics	3	25	9	2
Office administration	5	17	4	8
Retail operations	10	35	9	7
Construction (carpentry)	3	15	2	5
Commercial cookery	5	112	10	5
Metal fabrication / engineering	1	33	5	6
IT/electrical	3	26	2	3
Horticulture/ agriculture	-	4	3	3
Hairdressing	2	22	8	8
Store persons/ distribution/ Warehousing	3	29	2	8

* Some respondents indicated that they worked across more than one occupational area

Some significant characteristics about the sample of current apprentices and trainees are as follows. There was a spread of ages from 16 to 50, with 60% being between 17 and 20 years. Two thirds were male. Only just over one-half had completed Year 12. Significantly, one-quarter reported that they had a family member employed in the same industry. In terms of employment, just over two-thirds worked in the private sector, and just over half were employed in enterprises of less than 20 employees. One-fifth had changed employer during their contract of training, one-tenth had changed their job, and two percent had shifted to another industry. Half of those in the sample were in their first year of contract of training, one-fifth in each of the second and third years and one-twelfth in the final year. Five percent claimed they had broken their contract for a period of time. Most were in integrated training arrangements involving both on- and off-job training, with TAFE providing the off-job component in three-quarters of the cases. A significant percentage (43%) had taken vocational education subjects at school, and 40% had undergone some education/training between leaving school and commencing their apprenticeship or traineeship.

The profile of those who had completed their contracts of training was similar. The majority was now employed, 88% in the private sector, and interestingly, over a quarter (27%) had changed employer since completion of their contract and 42% had changed jobs, predominantly as a result of a promotion (71%). A small proportion (6%) had even changed industry. In their instance, a lesser proportion (62%) than the current learners reported that TAFE had been their off-job provider, while a slightly larger proportion (49%) had studied vocational education subjects at school.

Their managers and supervisors were spread across a wide range of occupations, with six out of ten employed in enterprises of less than 20 employees. Of the teachers and trainers, 55% were male and 75% worked in public training providers.

The overall picture of these samples is relatively consistent with what is known about them nationally. Their views on their contracts of training can therefore be considered with confidence, though this report is focused more on the nature of the factors affecting retention and completion rather than being concerned with measuring their prevalence within particular populations.

Full demographic data for each group can be found in Appendix B (Tables 2–47). The discussion now turns to the analysis of the interviews held with each of these four groups.

Findings

This section of the report analyses information gathered from 437 interviews with four different groups of people. Each group was selected in order to explore particular perspectives on the process of retention. As discussed in the research process section, these groups were:

- apprentices and trainees who had recently completed their contract of training (n=35)
- apprentices and trainees who were currently completing a contract of training (n=318)
- Registered Training Organisation teachers and trainers of apprentices and trainees (n=51)
- workplace managers and supervisors of apprentices and trainees (n=33).

There are several ways of framing the analysis of the gathered data/text to examine the range of factors that contribute to high retention and successful completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. At the most general level, the discussion can focus on all the information collected. This approach can provide an overall picture, and provide information about the range of factors. However, the limitation is that such a frame is likely to gloss over the complexity and not to capture in any detail specific variations. Accordingly, a second way is to discuss the data/text from the perspective of each industry. A third way is from the perspective of the type of interviewee — whether apprentice/trainee, teacher/trainer or workplace manager/supervisor. Each of these different perspectives is separately presented below.

Summary of findings based on all data

From an analysis of the overall data can be identified ten common factors that make an important contribution to the process of retention in apprenticeships and traineeships. The first two of these could be said to be prerequisites, without which it is unlikely a training contract would be entered into or, if entered into, would result in completion. Once the individual is embarked on a contract of training, the other eight factors appear to increase likelihood of completion. These ten general factors are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: General factors that contribute to the process of retention

- The individual taking up a training contract has a strong sense of personal agency
- The individual taking up a training contract has support from family / partner /friends
- Suitability of initial placement
- Previous satisfying work experience or school experience related to a particular occupational area
- Supportive workplace supervisors
- Supportive work/learning cultures
- Participation in structured training
- Reliable transport
- Availability of alternative career pathways
- Value placed on the qualification

These ten general factors are now discussed, drawing on examples from the interviews where appropriate.

The individual taking up a training contract has a strong sense of personal agency

For employers/supervisors/trainers this characteristic was usually articulated as 'having what it takes'. One NSW employer, for example, only took apprentices who played sport — on the grounds that, if they knew how to get on with their team mates, take the losses along with the wins, get to training and to matches every week, and on time, they probably had 'what it takes'.

A sense of personal agency manifests itself in terms of self-confidence, an ability to make friends, to talk easily with adults/authority figures and an ability to work towards long-term goals. By contrast young people without a strong sense of agency appear alienated (cut-off) from others, are seen to lack motivation and see little point in personal effort.

Apprentices/trainees, when asked about others they knew who had given up their training, sometimes cited 'not motivated enough'. Motivation is here being used as a description rather than an explanation. So-called 'lack of motivation' points to a deeper set of characteristics that, for the purpose of this study, has been labeled 'lack of personal agency'.

The individual taking up a training contract has support from family/partner/friends

Nearly all those who were interviewed for this study identified this factor. Employers often cited 'stable family background' as significant but many also identified the role of families in providing financial and material support. Virtually all those in training or recently completed training cited family support as a significant factor in allowing them to undertake and complete their training. The low wages paid to those under training contracts meant that family financial and material support was essential - both in starting training and in meeting any unexpected financial difficulties (such as car repairs) while under contract.

When asked about the times when they almost gave up their training, many of those interviewed recalled incidents that illustrated the significance of family support in enabling them to continue. For example, one young cooking apprentice lost her apprenticeship when the business she worked for failed. She was able to find herself a new placement in a town 50 kilometres away - because her parents were prepared to drive her back and forth (picking her up after midnight) until she was old enough to get her licence. They then bought her a car.

Suitability of initial placement

Where there appeared to be a good match between the desire of the apprentice/trainee to 'get a start' and the employer to train and support the new entrant to the workforce/trade, things appeared to work well for both sides. In these instances both employers and those in training gave many positive accounts of their experiences and demonstrated high levels of commitment to their apprenticeship or traineeship.

However, in many instances, employers did not always appear clear about either their employment requirements or their responsibilities in relation to training. They often appeared not to have suitable recruitment methods in place to ensure that they took on a person who would be suitable for their particular needs. They also appeared to be unclear about their role as providers of support and training.

Trainers offered the opinion that too often employers expected or needed full-time workers and were using the training system to recruit workers rather than to train workers ('all they want is a pair of hands').

Those in training often reported feeling exploited and underpaid for the work done ('I

was expected to make up for the time I missed when I went to TAFE'). For apprentices who reported having changed employer, dissatisfaction with the particular workplace/supervisor was a frequently cited reason for leaving.

Previous satisfying work experience or school experience related to a particular occupational area

This seemed a significant factor in helping to bring about a suitable initial placement (see 3 above). Employers reported using work experience to recruit young people with suitable aptitude/ work attitudes. At the same time the initial interest heightened the recruits' willingness/ability to 'get stuck in'. This in turn tended to mean they were given more interesting work ('I wasn't just sweeping the floor all the time - I got to do lots of different things right from the start').

Supportive workplace supervisors

Most apprentices/trainees cited the importance to them of being given encouragement and help from their immediate workplace supervisor. In situations where the person in training either came close to giving up or changing employer, one of the most common reasons given was dissatisfaction with their supervisor. Comments included 'supervisor/chef was always criticising or belittling, too demanding, never gave positive feedback, was always too busy to show the trainee what they were to do or how to do it'. Some also indicated that the supervisor treated them disrespectfully ('the boss was a total sleaze'). In contrast, Appendix C provides two positive case studies of workplace supervisors – one in cooking and one in hairdressing, the two occupations which consistently recorded low completion. They highlight some of the characteristics of supportive workplace supervision, such as respectful treatment, wise selection, satisfactory workplace conditions, commitment to training, interest in off-site learning and pitching in on all kinds of work tasks.

Supportive work/learning cultures

Those who expressed high satisfaction with their training and a strong intention to complete tended to see their workplace as supportive: 'It's a very friendly place - everyone is very friendly and helpful — and they'll spend time showing you how to do things if you don't know'.

They tended to see themselves as becoming more competent: 'I've learnt heaps'. They also tended to report that there were people they could go to for advice about work or training matters. This support might be provided by someone in the workplace (larger firms) or by training providers: 'The lady from [name of a training centre] came every month and that was really helpful — she was able to sort out any problems you were having'.

But the question of the impact of particular work cultures raised a broader question around the impact of a labour market structured around gender. A TAFE trainer of office management trainees reported that 80% of trainees in this area are female: 80% of supervisors are female. Among the carpentry and metal fabrication groups we talked to, 100% of apprentices and 100% of supervisors were male. During the course of the study a number of respondents suggested that all-male work cultures encourage a culture that reinforces behaviours (such as alcohol abuse) known to be bad for workers' health and unhelpful in terms of their ability to form and maintain sustaining relationships with others. Gendered work cultures may also have a direct impact on workplace learning. For example male trainees/apprentices may be less likely to seek help or advice.

Participation in structured training

Some form of structured training seemed essential in giving apprentices and trainees a sense of their growing competence and a measure of their skills in relation to others. This could take place either away from the work site (for example with a private provider or

at a TAFE college). Alternatively, it could include the removal of the apprentice/trainee from normal work routines to spend some time in the training rooms at the work site. Both employers and those in training seemed to value the off-job environment for both assessment and learning. Several employers had tried on-job assessment but had returned to using TAFE providers as TAFE proved more reliable and the demands of on-the-job training (in terms of time) proved too great. For apprentices and trainees, off-the-job training usually allowed them to build relationships with peers and 'compare notes' about other workplaces as well as acquiring new technical knowledge. A significant proportion of trainees in smaller enterprises — especially those that are not in the 'traditional' trades areas receive their training on-the-job (for example, IT and retail).

The off-the-job component of training sometimes places significant hardships on those in training. In rural areas, for example, some of those in training have to travel long distances to attend training sessions. For some, such as cooking apprentices, TAFE days have to be fitted in around shift work — often adding to the existing strains of such work. In spite of these reported difficulties, though, none of the second or third year cooking apprentices that participated in this study advocated the abolition of their TAFE training component and many appeared to highly value this aspect of their training. For some it was seen as a welcome relief from the pressures of work ('a bludge').

Reliable transport

Having reliable transport seemed a crucial determinant of whether a person completed their training contract. For some, such as office trainees who work regular office hours, adequate public transport is sufficient. However, as many apprentices/trainees are working in industries where split shifts and/or night shifts are the norm, a reliable motor vehicle was almost essential.

It was reported to the researchers that in rural areas transport is a major issue. Many apprentices have to travel long distances to undertake the off-the-job block training. The lack of suitable away-from-home accommodation was also cited as a major problem. For those living in the district in rural areas, transport was still a factor as there were generally no public transport services between home, the workplace and the TAFE or training centre.

Availability of alternative career pathways

Among urban cooking apprentices, the ability to leave unsatisfactory placements and find another placement appeared to be a major factor in determining completion. Many of the 3rd year apprentice cooks included in this study had been working with two or more employers. While some reported leaving because the business closed, most reported changing employers either to remove themselves from unsuitable situations or to broaden their experience. It appeared that, without this mobility, many of them would have failed to continue to third year. It was also reported that some cooking apprentices withdrew from their contracts once they realised that they were unsuited to the work of a chef ("unlikely to cut the mustard as a chef"). In some of these instances they moved into other areas in the industry (that is, they withdrew from the cooking apprenticeship but were not lost to the hospitality industry).

In contrast, in rural areas, it appeared that not only were there fewer alternative employers offering apprenticeships in a specific area but fewer alternative jobs. If a person left an apprenticeship, the end result was usually unemployment and the eventual need to leave town to search for work elsewhere. These observations suggest that there are significantly different mechanisms facilitating completion for urban and rural apprentices.

Value placed on the qualification

For those in contracts of training extending over several years, the value of the final trade qualification was very high, as was the individual's investment (in terms of

forgone income, etc.) in obtaining it. Just how costly is this investment was well captured by a third-year cooking apprentice who took the trouble to write a submission to the research team. This submission was handed to the researchers in the hope that "it might help improve things for future apprentices" (see Appendix D).

The author of this submission describes the obvious disillusionment he was currently feeling:

> *At this point of my apprenticeship I would, looking back, not have taken the path of a chef in training. As you can see by the above lists, I have made the necessary sacrifices to succeed. However, I was not aware that after the initial training period, apprentices are regularly exploited and made to work doing qualified chef duties, unsupervised. I now know that this is a common problem in this industry.*

These were sentiments that were reiterated many times by second and third year apprentices. The list of the pros and cons developed before he took up the apprenticeship demonstrates the point made earlier that those entering training contracts are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices. But if the cumulative effect of the negatives become great enough the person may come to see the price as too high — or simply not be able to continue because immediate needs cannot be met.

The submission also demonstrates the perceived value of the trade certificate and the high investment the individual (and his or her family) can have in it. The goal of 'making it to the finishing line' and obtaining the certificate can become a strong motivating force that gets many through the latter part of their contract.

This raises interesting questions about the future of this kind of training if the expectation of a secure employment future fails to be met because of other changes taking place in the industry – such as the deregulation of the labour market or the taking up of new technologies. One trainer of carpentry apprentices pointed to this gap between expectation and possible employment futures for those in the building trade. He pointed out that those apprentices who made it to the end were most likely to find themselves sub-contracting. He pointed out that nothing in their current training was aimed at helping prepare them for operating as small (one or two person) sub-contracting companies.

Summary of findings by type of industry

The second frame for analysis of the information gathered in this project is by type of industry. As the data analysis proceeded, it became clear that there were certain generalisations that could be made regarding factors affecting retention and completion of apprentices and trainees within particular industries. Below is a summary of this broad picture for each of the industries surveyed in this project.

Aircraft maintenance engineering (Certificate III)

Aircraft maintenance engineering has both apprentices and trainees. Apprentices have traditionally undertake a four-year apprenticeship. Trainees, who are relatively new to the industry, undertake a series of one-year contracts of training. These arrangements highlight job security as one of the key factors for apprentices and trainees. Many apprentices, trainees, supervisors, trainers and teachers interviewed for this study commented on the decrease in job security for the occupation over the past few years.

Other issues for apprentices and trainees in this occupation were the low pay (even after completion of their contract of training), not knowing what to expect when starting their apprenticeship/traineeship and being given mundane tasks or tasks not related to their apprenticeship traineeship.

However, many respondents commented that they found their work rewarding and interesting and that they enjoyed their study. They generally valued the company they

worked for and thought that their conditions of employment provided an excellent source of motivation.

Agriculture/Horticulture (Certificates I, II and III)

The industry is noted for its difficult working conditions and poor pay. It is not uncommon for farms to be 'understaffed', so trainees are called upon to work very long hours, to be called out at short notice and to have to work in all weathers and on public holidays. This can prove too much for some, especially where it impinges on family life and socialising.

Trainees are frequently in this industry because they 'love the land', love animals or come from a rural family background. Therefore retention is often a personal thing because close friends or relatives are involved in the immediate working environment, and because it tends to be a personal choice of lifestyle.

Carpentry and joinery (Certificate III)

The most striking aspect of this industry was the general satisfaction held for both the apprentices in training and the training program they were undertaking. Many apprentices spoke of their enjoyment of their work and the work environment. They commented that having plenty of work available and a good range of work were factors that contributed to them completing their contract of training. The apprentices valued their training both on- and off-the-job, although some wished that their off-job studies were more practically orientated.

Reasons given by apprentices for not completing their contract of training generally centred on the notion of "not being suited to the job", laziness or other interests. Personal circumstances and breakdowns in working relationships were also cited as reasons for non-completion.

However, group training scheme arrangements that employed many of the apprentices often solved issues around work variety and poor working conditions. These schemes sought to find new employers for apprentices when their placements were discontinued (due to collapsed businesses or poor work relationships) and to rotate apprentices who might otherwise not gain the full range of experiences required to complete their apprenticeship.

Computing technicians (Certificate II)

The market for information technology trainees is highly segmented. Larger firms require the Certificate IV as an 'entry level' qualification and the Certificate II in Information Technology is of little interest, except to smaller employers needing some way of 'sifting' new recruits. The Certificate II program is very elementary, and operates as an introductory course or a bridging course for school leavers, or students who see it as a 'foot in the door' to a job. Hence Certificate II in Information Technology traineeships (those where the trainee is under contract to an employer) are rare. Given this, it is not surprising that the retention rate in the Certificate II in Information Technology is low in some states (depending on the local labour market). Trainees realise that the qualification itself is of little value and leave as soon as they can get a job in the information technology area.

Some employers note that educational background can be important factor in successful completion (for example, those with information technology subjects and/or those who have done Year 11 or 12). However the most important factors identified by trainers are the personal ones: enthusiasm, self-discipline and work ethic. From the point of view of the trainee, 'attitude' is constructed as personal commitment to the course and an information technology career, as seen in this trainee's comments on his difficulties during the training program:

I was pretty young at the time. I was always thinking "was this was the right choice? Am I going to still like this when I'm 30 years old?" So basically I just wanted to make sure that I had the right thing, that I was going to like it for the rest of my life (Trainee)

The workplace situation itself could also be an important factor in the retention process. A few trainees feel they have low status and are being used as cheap labour. Others drop out because the reality differs from expectations—they find they don't enjoy 12 hours a day in front of a computer monitor!

Cooks (Certificate III)

The national shortage of trained cooks – a serious problem for an expanding and increasingly important industry – is further compounded by the low completion rate for Commercial Cookery apprenticeships. The reasons for this low rate are complex.

Despite the glossy image of chefs and their work portrayed in various TV cooking shows, the reality is very different. Employees in the hospitality industry have heavy demands placed on them because of the high pressure of work and the nature of their working life — 'un-social' hours, excessive (and often unpaid) overtime and broken shifts – and this can impact on their lifestyle:

They go to work at four and come home at four. They live to work. They have no social life. Their health suffers and once their health suffers they get into all sorts of other things that really we don't want them into. (Trainer)

Moreover, while on the job, cooks work under especially high pressure because of the physical demands of kitchen work (heat, steam and lifting). This, together with the long hours, places apprentices under enormous strain:

... they are flogged and burnt out by the end of five, six or seven years. (Trainer)

This pressure is acerbated by a long tradition of hierarchical and aggressive working relationships in the cooking trade, although less common now-a-days:

You still get a lot of chefs who have the attitude, "Well, my arse was kicked when I was an apprentice, so I'm going to kick your arse, and that still goes on in the industry. (Trainer)

Given that the life of the apprentice cook is one of poor wages, unsociable hours and unpaid overtime, what are the personal factors associated with completion of the apprenticeship? Many apprentices will endure working long hours under stress if they feel they are still learning, but there are limits to this. For many the motivation to complete the apprenticeship is primarily extrinsic —they stay in the course for the status of the certificate, to enter a well-paid career or to travel overseas.

Gender can be important in this, with females surviving better in the industry:

I would say that most of the female students get through – they don't struggle so much – they tend to have a higher education base when they come to us ...

Male students, on the other hand, were sometimes difficult to teach:

[re a group of 3rd year male apprentices] *They're a hard group ... they're very noisy. A lot of those boys in there haven't got great cooking skills but they've got jobs and they realise that ... [one told me] 'I can't wait to finish. I can't wait to get out of this, I just want to get into management, I don't want to cook any more.*

However the most frequently cited factor in surviving the apprenticeship was a passion for cooking:

It's very much a passionate thing. If you don't have a very high passion for food and the industry and you're expected to work in excess of 60 hours a week, sometimes the had outweighs the good. (Trainer)

Some felt that enterprise agreements in larger workplaces (for example, the Sheraton Hotel chain) were a good model for improving the lot of workers and apprentices in the hospitality industry generally — while recognising the problem for smaller firms.

The life of the apprentice cook is tough, with long hours, broken shifts, an exhausting pace of work and a tradition of autocratic kitchen management. Moreover, apprentice cooks must often make personal sacrifices, their new lifestyle distancing them from old friends. Thus apprentice cooks must be very clear in their minds about the rewards of their training (for example, enjoyment of the work, status, travel) to stay in it to the end, and this commitment requires a high degree of personal maturity. Most of the apprentices interviewed were survivors in this respect. They loved the art of food preparation and the kitchen environment and looked forward to gaining the ticket to practise anywhere in the world, so were prepared to put up with the stress and the hours in order to get there. However, it is easy to understand why others less passionate about cooking or less committed to a career in the industry might leave. Interventions to change would best be done on an industry-wide basis.

Electrical and telecommunications assistants (Certificate II)

The Certificate II traineeship in Electrotrades is *de facto* the first year of an electrical apprenticeship, with trainees simply 'rolling over' into the Certificate III course in their second year. In this context, trainees are highly likely to complete the Certificate II; as one TAFE trainer put it: "I would say that's a pretty good incentive".

Most students enrolled in the Certificate II in Telecommunications (Cabling) are pre-apprenticeship students, or mature-age telecommunications employees and tradesmen undertaking the course as a stand-alone licensing requirement. Hence there are very few trainees under contract to an employer in the program. These trainees may withdraw for three reasons:

- some see the 'old' course as irrelevant (it is being replaced in 2001)
- some find the work unsatisfying ("They don't like what they're doing on the job")
- some are exploited by their employers under the subsidy system:
  In our traineeships, we found a lot of the employers also have not done the right thing by the trainee ... it's just been a bit of only slave labour if you like.

However all this has little effect on the overall retention rate because of the low numbers of trainees involved in this course.

Hairdressing (Certificate III)

The wages for apprentices commencing in this industry is low and the cost of uniform and equipment is significant. Working conditions are often far from glamorous. Family support is important and apprentices living in the parental home seem more likely to continue with their studies.

Because hairdressing is usually a small business, the relationship between the apprentice and the business owner is critical. Apprentices complained frequently that they were "treated like dirt", ordered about in a rude way and made to do all the basic jobs (for example, shampooing and sweeping up hair). They were often required to work long hours with very short lunch breaks and given very little training on the job. Depending on the salon, the staff may be required to work with minimal or no breaks during the day. The hours of work may be very long depending on the salon and the time of the year (for example, busy at Christmas and Melbourne Cup).

The nature of the industry was seen by interviewees to be very competitive, both within some salons and between some salons. This characteristic can lead to a less than supportive learning atmosphere as staff are competing with each other for clients and

may be reluctant to 'stop work and teach someone'. Moreover, the nature of the salon was seen to be detrimental to the learning, development and future employment prospects of apprentices if they were employed in a salon which 'had old ideas'. That is, the apprentice would be less employable at another salon if they had learnt only 'the old styles'. Apprentices subjected to this type of environment, and with no family or peer support network, are in a vulnerable position and may decide to withdraw. Mjelde (1990, p.43) found a similar situation in her study of Norwegian apprentices, where one hairdresser said, "Most hairdressers are put on the shit jobs the first year. You are exploited. You do exactly the same as fully trained apprentices, but are paid much less." Her research concluded that the majority of negative assessments about the vocational system stemmed "from exploitative working conditions and wages rather than from the method of learning" (Mjelde 1990, p.44).

Office managers and general clerks (Certificates II and III)

Trainees in this industry often viewed their traineeship as a means of "getting a foot in the door". They tended to see completing the traineeship as the first step towards a career, which may or may not continue to be in the office administration area.

Office administration trainees, teachers / trainers and employers all considered that the internal motivation of the trainee was important in getting trainees to complete their contract of training. Trainees often cited their motivation as being based on obtaining an qualification and the prospect of earning more money at the end of the traineeship.

Trainees often felt frustrated when the work they were doing did not match their off-job studies. Sometimes this was due to being given menial tasks in the workplace and tasks that were not directly related to their traineeship. In other cases, trainees' frustration was due to being asked to work at a higher level that was warranted by their contract of training. Other hurdles that trainees faced included low pay, lack of respect in the workplace, personality clashes and, in some instances, harassment.

Sales assistants (Certificate II)

There are no formal entry requirements for entry into the retail industry beyond completion of compulsory schooling. The content of the training program in Certificate II in Retail Operations is comprehensive but relatively undemanding, being aimed primarily at familiarising trainees with a wide range of issues related to the retail trade. Hence attitudes (e.g. commitment, reliability and enthusiasm) are seen as more important than the possession of particular skills. Nevertheless, trainers feel that a good standard of prior education is important, and one large employer now uses a literacy test to screen its applicants.

Trainees in the program come from diverse backgrounds, ranging from school students and school leavers to university dropouts (one group included three ex-University students with unfinished degrees in Arts, Design and Business). Regardless of background, trainee motivation appears to be instrumental rather than intrinsic. School students said: "It will get me a certificate"; "I will learn skills and get on a management track". Ex-university students commented: "It will give me a certificate"; "I want to have something on my resume I can fall back on"; "It is a stepping stone"; "I want to get into management".

Training in smaller workplaces usually involves 'on-the-job' contact, some trainers visiting every 6 weeks; training programs for larger employers are more structured and tend to occur off-the-job. One problem is that there is some confusion amongst employers and trainees about the nature of traineeships.

The completion rate in Certificate II in Retail operations is generally high — although lower in smaller workplaces. Family support is one of the factors affecting retention rate, although there is disagreement about its relative importance. Some trainees drop out when they move in with a partner because of surrounding family problems, while others

leave home simply because they need more money than the training wage ($241 a week). Trainees who decide to move back home in the country cannot continue if the host employer has no rural branch there.

The nature of the industry itself is also important, with trainees having to be available for shifts 24 hours a day 7 days a week (in theory) under the federal award. One chain store trainee class listed the following workplace factors as important: "the hours, customers, the people you work with and how management treat you". The same class liked the trainer and the training (and the attractions of the nearby suburban shopping plaza) but complained of the length of the program, the low training wage and the expense of travel to the class (parking and petrol). Trainees' reasons for withdrawal from traineeships include: insufficient work available, unable to fit in training with school schedules or finding another job they like better.

It seems that smaller employers use the Certificate II training program to guarantee a minimum level of competence, but it is claimed that a minority of "unscrupulous" employers are merely interested in the training subsidy ($1250). Larger employers use the program to sift through trainee staff and identify those with potential for 'rolling over' into the Certificate III course and promotion to trainee manager. Hence the high retention rate for Certificate II trainees in Retail operations may be largely due to the fact that it is a career path for management trainees in larger organisations — from the perspectives of both the trainees and employers.

Fabrication engineering tradespersons (Certificates II to IV)

Although there has been a sharp decline in the number of metal trades apprenticeships due to a general decline in manufacturing and public sector outsourcing, trainee numbers in the sheetmetal industry have been maintained. The training system is highly structured, with most trainees 'rolling over' into an apprenticeship at the end of their first year. Access and pre-vocational programs are seen as 'a good way to go' allowing potential trainees to sample the trade before they enter a contract.

Under the new apprenticeship system training the industry has with greater involvement with the content and assessment of competency assessment – and this industry link is an advantage for trainees. School ('Pathways') programs are not always successful because they are not as closely related to industry needs:

> *... there's one [school] where they made a toolbox and part of the exercise was that they did the prototype out of cardboard.* (Trainer)

Apprentices may find their early years daunting: as well as low training wages, they must also endure close supervision from boss and foreman:

> *When you're doing your first year they keep picking on you. They like to pick on everything to make sure ... like, they're trying to help but its just frustrating.*

On top of close supervision, trainees may also suffer levels of harassment which are endemic in some industries. One trainer recounted his own experience as a new apprentice some years before:

> *... I was about 10 or 15 minutes late. And the next thing they had me down on the bloody ground, one of them had his knees across my arms like this, so they're playing bloody tom toms on my bloody chest, like.*

Some trainers felt that the biggest problem in the (predominantly male) industry is that trainees and apprentices are torn between the demands of their training program and the workplace on the one hand, and the perils and lures of adolescence on the other.

> *The biggest hurdle ... what people have got to understand is that when kids are serving their apprenticeships, they're going through the most awkward period of their life – they're bloody teenagers. ... It's a very trying time for them while they're going through mixed emotions ... I mean a kid just explodes. They might have pressure from home, there's pressure from a girlfriend, there's pressure from all different areas. ... They seem to get on a spiral ... and you've got to try to have a supportive situation whilst they're here.* (Trainer)

In such a pressured environment, the ones who survive training are those who have long term goals:

> *... they're the type of guy that do want to get somewhere, and they're not after money straight away.* (Employer)

For the apprentice, gaining the qualification was a key to later success:

> *The certificate can help you, like, do other things later on ... 'cause you can do some more courses... you can travel the world.* (Apprentice)

While money was a problem early in the training, this became less important later on:

> *The first year's pay is pretty low ... it's shocking ... but once you get to third year you're cruising.* (Apprentice)

Personal support is important for young trainees and apprentices, especially from their families:

> *You can tell the parents that are concerned about those issues, they ring me up and they talk to you about it ... You've got others and you can get really blunt answers like 'Well, I don't care; he took it on, if he doesn't do it, he fails.*

As well as providing background stability, families can also offer help in more direct and practical ways such as board and transport "if it's not there, they tend to drop off."

Support is especially important in the case of those from rural areas:

> *We've got lads here that come down from* [country town] *... now we're talking three or four hours' drive to here, and if their parents are not willing to help them with that process, they don't come here.*

Ideally, support comes from all parties involved – trainers and employers, as well as family. Group training companies are better able to offer this support than the small employer, and their trainees are more likely to 'roll-over' into an apprenticeship. The support of employers, is also important:

> *...we know that you're driving back on Friday afternoon at 4 or 5 in the evening – look, we'll pay you for those couple of hours.* (Trainer)

However apprentices can be vulnerable to exploitation by the few employers who simply want to "rape and pillage the system" or when the host business unexpectedly closes down:

> *"Three years ago, a major company that had 5 apprentices ... one Friday afternoon they were all dismissed, the whole workforce. The whole 5 of them got in a car and came over and seen me and said 'What do we do about it?'* (Trainer)

Finally, it should be noted that in the case of young working class males in the metal trades a low retention rate may reflect the high-risk personal lifestyle they lead. Thus, one trainer (somewhat morbidly) warned his class of first year fitters of the likelihood of motorbike accidents and suicide:

> *The sad part of it is, there's at least 5 of you will not make it to the end of the apprenticeship – you'll be dead.* (Trainer)

Storepersons (Certificates II to IV)

There is a high completion rate for traineeships in this occupational group. One large chain store's rural warehouse reported a 96% completion rate, due to a combination of contextual factors and the nature of the training contract. Firstly, a high level of local unemployment made traineeship an attraction option. Secondly, the traineeships formed part of a clear career path, with the likelihood of full time employment after completion of the 12-month training program:

> *I think with this establishment here, with the unemployment rate the way it is, we've just opened doors for them. ...They can see there's a career opening there ... and we're not just offering them a job, we're offering them an actual structured recognised training course.*

Thirdly, with two thirds of the trainees surveyed over 25 years of age (and a quarter over 40 years of age) this group were likely to have a greater degree of personal maturity in their approach to the training program.

Trainees in this warehouse were enrolled in a TAFE program on the work site. The store management had a great deal of input into the training program itself, with the result that it was seen as practical and relevant to the particular work situation.

> *We can actually show them or teach them how to do something and the employee can then take it straight on to the workplace and have it reinforced there.*

Trainees' experience of the workplace was satisfying: they were rotated into different jobs rather than being 'stuck in dispatch' for 25 years (as typically happens in the industry) and enjoyed working with colleagues – a satisfaction reinforced by the work-team system.

The greatest difficulty for these older trainees was a lack of confidence. The support of family or partner was important in this. Although with older trainees family considerations could also be a problem, the employer was supportive:

> *What we try to impress on our people is that, 'Okay, your partner's being moved – you can move your traineeship as well'.*

Summary of findings by type of interviewee

The third frame for analysis of the information gathered in this project is by type of interviewee. Interview schedules were analysed in the different groups of interviewees and responses clustered into meaningful categories. This part of the report provides a brief summary of the responses given by each of these groups of interviewees to questions relating directly to the subject of this study—namely, retention and completion. Figure 5 indicates interviewees' judgements on what hindered apprentices and trainees in continuing and completing their contracts of training.

Figure 6 summarises interviewees' judgements on what helped apprentices and trainees in continuing and completing their contracts of training.

All interviewees regarded the factors affecting retention and completion to be interrelated and complex, although individual respondents placed different emphasis on particular factors.

All parties believed that the process of retention was affected in a negative way by work related conditions such as low wages, harassment at work and a work environment that offered only routine and 'boring' work. They also noted that personal factors, including mismatch between apprentice's/trainee's ability and personality with the requirements of the job and changes to personal circumstances, affected the retention process.

It is also significant to note those factors mentioned by one group of respondents and not others. Apprentices, trainees and their teachers and trainers highlighted the impact of factors such as poor pay and work conditions and poor quality on-the-job training on retention. Employers, on the other hand, were more likely to attribute poor retention to particular personal attributes of the apprentice/trainee or poor off-the job training. Apprentices and trainees were 'lone voices' in expressing concern that retention was affected by issues relating to pay levels not being commensurate with the work they undertook.

In relation to the factors that assist or enable apprentices/trainees to complete their contracts of training, there were also some important differences between the groups of interviewees. All three groups believed that the motivation of the individual apprentice/trainee was a significant factor in enhancing retention and promoting completion. Trainers and employers noted the value of a supportive family background to the process. Trainers/teachers, together with the apprentices/trainees, believed that

Figure 5: Aspects or circumstances identified by interviewees that made it difficult for apprentices/trainees to continue and complete their apprenticeship/traineeship

Aspect or circumstance that makes it difficult to continue and complete an apprenticeship/traineeship	Apprentices/ trainees	Teachers/ trainers	Employers/ supervisors
Low wages, particularly in the first and second year of a traineeship or apprenticeship	√	√	√
The level of pay, in their opinion, not being commensurate with the value of the work being done	√		
Being exploited or not receiving their correct entitlements (for example, being paid for overtime)	√	√	
Employers who abuse, harass, exploit or treat apprentices/trainees unfairly; other difficulties with employers, supervisors or work colleagues	√	√	√
Work that is boring and/or repetitious (for example, apprentice cooks only making salads, apprentice carpenters only cleaning and sweeping)	√	√	√
Work or responsibilities that are not regarded as appropriate to their status as an apprentice or trainee (for example, second year apprentice cooks being left in charge of a kitchen)	√	√	
Work conditions, particularly long hours without appropriate breaks or days off, heavy work loads, occupational health and safety issues	√	√	
Lack of social life	√	√	
Mismatch between the expectations of the apprentice/trainee and the employer/supervisor due to poor recruitment practices		√	
Poor quality off-the-job training in terms of its lack of relevance to their current workplace; dissatisfaction with the teacher's/trainer's knowledge and teaching style; learning is not new	√		√
Poor quality or lack of on-the-job training; employers who do not meet their obligations in terms of training	√	√	
Finding out they do not like or are not suited to the type of work associated with the occupational area they are in	√	√	√
Changes in personal circumstances such as getting pregnant, the employer going out of business, needing to leave home and live independently	√	√	√
Personal traits or attributes such as poor work performance, lack of desire to do well, poor work ethic, lack of desire to do well, problems with time management, poor communication and interpersonal skills			√

the promise of future stable employment and increased wages enhanced retention, as did the quality of the learning undertaken in both the on- and off-job sites (where relevant).

The overall message from the apprentices and trainees who participated in this study was that they were assisted to remain committed to their contract of training when they:

- recognised the value of the qualification as a career objective,
- were provided with support during personal difficulties,
- were given the chance to use the skills they were learning,
- were given a variety of work that was challenging,
- had access to training away from the workplace that was integrated with and matched the tasks they did at work, and
- felt they were a valued member of their work place; treated fairly and with respect.

Figure 6: Aspects or circumstances identified by interviewees as assisting or enabling apprentices and trainees to continue and complete their apprenticeship or traineeship

Aspect or circumstance that assists or enables apprentices/trainees to continue and complete an apprenticeship/traineeship	Apprentices/ trainees	Teachers/ trainers	Employers/ supervisors
Accumulation of knowledge, skills and experience which makes the work easier and/or leads to being given more interesting work and greater responsibility	√		
Variety and challenge in the work that they do	√		
Promise of future stable employment and more money	√	√	√
Employer/supervisor who provides encouragement and supports the apprentice/trainee through the learning process and with whatever workplace and/or personal difficulties they may encounter	√		
Apprentice's/trainee's desire to do well, motivation and/or determination to succeed against the odds	√	√	√
Recognition of the value of the qualification	√		
Wage increases; receiving their correct entitlements (for example, being paid for overtime)	√		
Supportive family, networks, partner	√	√	√
Having the value of their work recognised and appreciated by employers, supervisors and work colleagues	√		
Good working conditions, particularly regular hours, appropriate breaks and days off	√		
Good relationships/communication with employer/ supervisor	√		√
Funding assistance to employers to allow them to take on and retain apprentices/trainees		√	
Good quality off-the-job training in terms of its relevance to their current workplace and future job opportunities, the teacher's / trainer's knowledge and teaching style, and the extent to which they learn new skills and knowledge and have a broad range of experiences	√	√	
Opportunity provided by off-the-job training to interact with peers	√	√	
Good quality on-the-job training, and an employer/ supervisor who takes the time to provide training and to help with the learning process	√		
Continuing to love/like the type of work associated with the occupational area they are in	√		
Support and assistance to cope with changes in personal circumstances such as the need to leave home and live independently	√		
Quality training in terms of receiving a broad range of skills and experience	√	√	
The size of the employer – as a general rule, the larger the employer, the more training will be provided and the more opportunities to get a range of experiences		√	

Conclusions and implications

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the range of factors that contribute to retention in and successful completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. This purpose was articulated into a number of research questions that guided the research process. Following a preliminary analysis of apprenticeship and traineeship national data, interviews were held with 437 people to examine factors that were perceived to contribute to observed levels of completion and retention for trainees and apprentices in eleven occupational groups. The results have been reported and this section of the report now focuses on some of the implications of the findings.

This study has highlighted some of the characteristics relating to the process of retention. Retention is a dynamic process and the factors that affect retention change over time. The type of interventions needed to assist newly appointed apprentices or trainees and encourage them in their commitment to their contract of training will be different from those needed for apprentices or trainees in the last few months of their contract of training. Another important feature of the process of retention highlighted by this study is its occupational specificity. The phenomena of retention and completion can only be fully understood within the context of a particular occupation's culture. Any overall discussion of factors or analysis of aggregated national statistics affecting retention and completion can only be general, as the nature of the particular occupation is critically important. A clear example from this study is that of cooks. In this case, the shift work, long hours and the often temperamental and volatile nature of those with whom they worked are part of the culture of the occupation. Therefore, reasons for the characteristic high mobility and low retention of cooking apprentices become clearer within that cultural context.

During the course of this study some evidence suggested that there was tendency between all parties (apprentices/trainees, managers/supervisors and teachers/trainers) to blame each other for the perceived 'problem' of poor retention. In fact, however, this study highlights that retention is a complex, interactive process that includes a range of factors (industry, workplace and training factors as well as personal) rather than a simple cause/effect relationship. The interaction between factors is often specific to the way that an occupation is structured. Retention is the *collective* responsibility of all parties involved in the vocational training environment. It is clear that whilst factors associated with the 'personal agency' of the individual apprentice and trainee (motivation, confidence and other personal resources) are central to their deciding whether they remain in a training contract, there are a number of other factors outside the individual which can affect this decision.

A model of the process of retention in apprenticeships and traineeships

From the beginning, it was not the intention to take a positivist path in this research – first to devise a model and then to test it in the field. Rather, this project was to be a broader and more general study of factors across five States/Territories. It was one that relied more on a grounded theory approach – first to gather the information, and then to develop a model that would incorporate the variety of factors that emerged from the field. This model is presented in Figure 7. The model has been constructed from reviewing the literature and analysing the interviews. It cannot be definitive, but it represents a comprehensive profile of those aspects that influence retention in and completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. In this respect, it furnishes a map of the training landscape which can be used by all parties – whether for the purposes of policy-making, researching, program planning, financing, reforming systems, training, managing or simply learning.

For the purposes of this study, retention has been defined as a process that can lead to a number of events, one of which is completion and others which can be categorised as non-completion (cancellation/withdrawal). For each individual entering the apprenticeship/traineeship system, there are personal factors or 'baggage' they bring with them (*antecedent factors*) that will greatly impact on their retention and the likelihood of completion. These include personal characteristics (such as age and gender), prior experiences of education and perhaps work, and personal attributes (such as learning skills and self-perceptions) developed from the preceding characteristics and experiences. It should also be remembered that most apprentices/trainees begin their contract of training as adolescents – a life stage when they are most in need of support.

As they enter the training system and progress through it, there are also factors or circumstances pertaining to their environment (*context factors*) that play an important part in the retention or otherwise of the individual. These include community and family networks and supports and the actual form of their training contract.

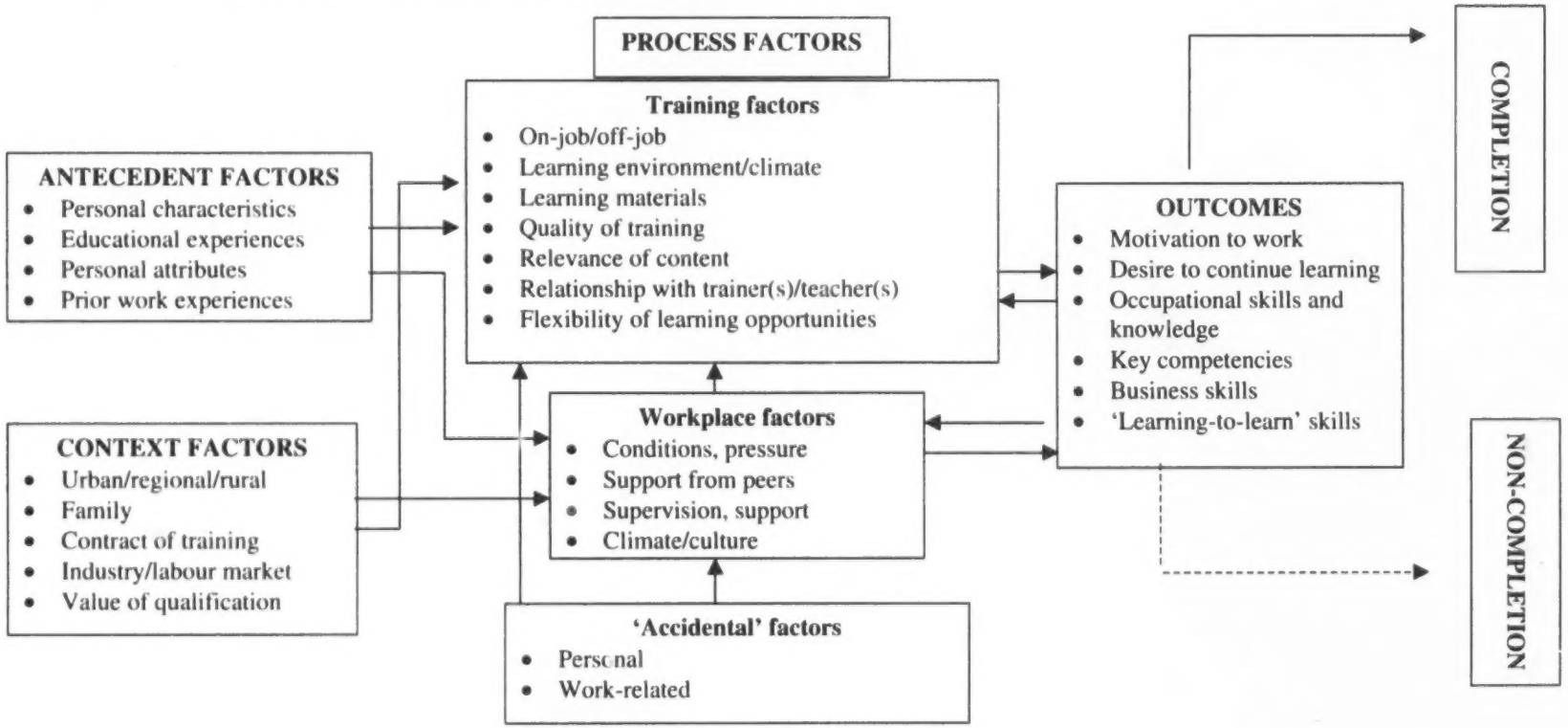
On the journey through the training system, there are then features of their on-the-job and off-the-job training (*process factors*) – or only the former if their contract of training is totally in the workplace – that again play a role in determining whether they complete or do not complete. In both of these possible outcomes, there are *outcomes* that should not be neglected – in the interests of model comprehensiveness – because they define or describe the exiting individual. These factors would apply in both the case of completion *and* non-completion, though, in the tradition of accepting that finishing an educational qualification is a desirable and valued act, would be more significant in the case of training contract completion. However, it should be recognised that 'non-completion' may also often be viewed as a satisfactory outcome, as for example when individuals move to another job or judge that they have acquired what they wanted from their course before leaving it. While the 'system' may judge that non-completion is less than satisfactory, in many cases non-completers themselves do not necessarily see themselves as 'drop-outs'.

As an apprentice/trainee moves through the training system, a number of *'accidental' factors* may also impact on the process of retention. These can be either work related (such as retrenchment due to the closure of a business) or personal (relationship breakdown, health related issues). They are usually unpredictable, and can be great sources of stress that can severely limit the amount of time and energy an individual can give to their work and learning.

Because of the unique circumstances surrounding each apprentice/trainee and each contract of training, it is extremely difficult and somewhat reductionist to proclaim any 'league table' of factors that affect retention and completion. While this study has explored from many different perspectives the range of such factors, the researchers cannot rank them in significance with any degree of certainty, nor specify with any confidence the relationships between these factors. Their impact for any individual apprentice/trainee varies depending upon the particular combination of antecedent, context, training, workplace and accidental factors as shown in the model in Figure 7.

However, the researchers can state from the gathered data and from the resultant model of the retention process that apprentices and trainees are more likely to be retained in and to complete their contract of training if the following conditions are present.

Figure 7: The process of retention in apprenticeships and traineeships



Personal

- they have developed an interest in the occupation (for example, via work experience and/or pre-vocational courses)
- they have medium and long-term goals for themselves in the occupation
- they have a high level of personal maturity
- they have the support of family/friends/partner
- they have taken into consideration other demands on their time and energy (family, sport, friends, etc.)

Industry and labour market

- the qualification they are undertaking is perceived to be valuable in the public domain
- there are few alternatives in the occupational area offering better rewards to those without qualifications

'Accidental'

- the apprentice/trainee is able to access resources to cope with changes in personal circumstances (relationships, pregnancy, injury, shifting house – especially long distances, car breakdown, etc.)
- the apprentice/trainee is able to access resources to cope with changes in workplace circumstances (retrenchment, closure, take over, etc.)

Workplace

- the apprentice/trainee is able to develop and use a wide range of skills and knowledge
- the hours and demands of work are realistic and reasonable
- the physical conditions of work are not too onerous
- the interpersonal relationships are satisfying
- management and supervision is supportive

Training

- the length of the contract of training is commensurate with its rewards
- there is a high level of integration in their training, both in terms of on- and off-job environments and linkages between traineeships and apprenticeships
- the trainers/teachers are seen to be experienced in the industry, efficient and supportive
- there is some flexibility in the contract of training (for example, so that the apprentice/trainee can be relocated to another workplace if necessary)

Outcomes

- all parties (apprentices/trainees, managers/supervisors, teachers/trainers) recognise and value the skills and knowledge developed over the contract of training
- the apprentice/trainee develops persistence over the time they are in training

Potential interventions to promote retention and enhance completion

Throughout the course of the study, a number of factors have been found to impact on the process of retention. Some of these factors are relatively stable and are difficult or impossible to change. Such factors would include individual characteristics of the apprentice/trainee and the context in which they find themselves. Other factors, such as those that impact on the quality of the processes that comprise the contract of training, are more amenable to change and, in fact, may ameliorate some of the effects of other more static factors. Enhancing the process of retention, therefore, requires that the factors most amenable to change be the sites for primary intervention.

Figure 8 outlines possible interventions that may be used to enhance the process of retention in apprenticeships and traineeships. These interventions either emerged during interviews with participants or were developed by the researchers based on their observations, experiences and analyses of the literature on apprenticeships and traineeships. The major criteria for selecting any intervention need to taken into account:

- the occupational context in which the intervention might be implemented, and
- the degree to which it addresses those factors affecting the process of retention that are most amenable to change within that context.

Retention is a process that is the collective responsibility of all key stakeholders within the vocational education and training system. In many respects, retention is one of the products to derive from a quality training system where an appropriate and realistic balance is achieved between the learning needs and aspirations of apprentices and trainees and the needs and expectations of employers and industry.

Figure 8: Interventions to enhance retention in apprenticeships and traineeships

Factors most amenable to change	Possible interventions
PERSONAL • Prior skill development / work experience • Long-term goals • Support from peers, family, partner, friends • Competing demands for time and energy (family, etc.)	• Apprentices and trainees should have access to timely and relevant career counselling. • Curriculum development practices should enhance linkages between work experience, pre vocational programs and apprenticeships/traineeships. This should also include greater attention to recognition of prior learning / current competency to reduce length of contract of training. • Support and resources for employers to enhance their selection processes should be provided. • Induction processes should ensure that expectations of all parties are clarified and understood. • Expectations in relation to learning processes and outcomes should be clearly documented in training plans and used as a basis for monitoring progress over time. • Induction processes, information and awareness raising strategies should be designed to include parents/family to inform them of the expectations, requirements of the contract of training, etc.

INDUSTRY AND LABOUR MARKET
• Occupational entry requirements
• Value / marketability of qualification:
  • Potential for self-employment (costs of establishing business)
  • Career prospects (promotion, travel, etc.)
• Wages and conditions available outside the occupational area
	• An improved industrial relations system for apprenticeships and traineeships should be examined, including:
	  • established industry benchmarks for breaks, hours, trainee wages via the award system, and
	  • encouragement of enterprise agreements.
	• Improved efforts need to be directed to maintaining the currency and value of qualifications within specific industries and to ensure that the skills and knowledge required by apprentices and trainees after graduation are developed (for example, small business skills).
	• A scheme in which apprentices and trainees on low wages (e.g. first years) could be given access to concessions similar to those available to people on unemployment benefits should be investigated.

Factors most amenable to change	Possible interventions
WORKPLACE • Breadth and depth of work available to apprentices and trainees • Level of work demands • Peers (support and companionship) • Supervisors/managers (supportive) • Work conditions	• Information, resources and training should be made available to employers and workplace trainers to enhance their knowledge and skills on a range of issues including communication, organising and structuring work to facilitate learning and providing feedback to apprentices and trainees. • Information, resources and training should be made available to off-site teachers and trainers to ensure they are up-to-date with current work practices in their occupational areas. • Mechanisms should be established to deal with reported incidences of workplace harassment and bullying. Possible strategies include the availability of an independent and confidential hot line or ombudsman to receive complaints from apprentices and trainees. • Requirements relating to occupational health and safety should be monitored in a consistent and on-going manner. Responsibility for monitoring and reporting breaches of occupational health and safety, bullying and harassment (by whom, how etc.) should be clearly articulated.

TRAINING IN ON- AND OFF-SITE ENVIRONMENTS
• Structure of training
  • Length of contract of training
  • Level of integration between traineeships/apprenticeships and other vocational qualifications
• Level of course demands
• Integration of learning with activities in the workplace
	• Trainees and apprentices should have access to training programs that include the development of 'learning to learn' skills.
	• Induction programs for apprentices and trainees should specifically include training in how to manage the process of learning in the workplace and survival skills to counter potential workplace harassment, exploitation, etc.
	• Curriculum development practices should enhance linkages between work experience /pre-vocational programs and traineeships/apprenticeships. This should also include greater attention to recognition of prior learning / current competency to reduce length of contract of training.
	• Study skills support should routinely be made available to all apprentices and trainees.
	• Strategies should be put in place to help apprentices and trainees integrate their learning from the multiple learning environments they may encounter over the period of their contract of training.

Factors most amenable to change	Possible interventions
TRAINING IN ON- AND OFF-SITE ENVIRONMENTS (continued)	• Efforts to promote the value of withdrawal of apprentices and trainees from routine work for training purposes should be explored (to counter effects of isolation, to increase exposure to different ideas and people)
'ACCIDENTAL' FACTORS • Changes in personal circumstances • Changes in workplace circumstances	• Personal counselling services and access to emergency financial support should be made available. • Mechanisms such as those that currently exist within group training schemes to transfer apprentices and trainees between employers should be further developed.

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Appendix A:
Sample interview schedule

Apprentices and Trainees – currently under a contract of training

About you

Age _____ **Gender** male ❑ female ❑

Highest level completed at school year 12 ❑ year 11 ❑ year 10 ❑ year 9 or below ❑

Where do you live? capital city ❑ other city ❑ rural ❑ remote ❑ **State:** _____

Language spoken in the home you grew up in _____

Does anyone in your family work in the same or a similar industry to your apprenticeship/traineeship? yes ❑ no ❑

Please give details:

_____

About your current job

Where do you work? capital city ❑ other city ❑ rural ❑ remote ❑ **State:** _____

What is your current occupation? _____

Which of the following best describes your current workplace? public sector ❑ private enterprise ❑ group training ❑

What is the size of your current workplace? <5 workers ❑ 5 - 19 workers ❑ 20 – 99 workers ❑ >100 workers ❑

During your apprenticeship/traineeship, have you . . .

Changed employer? yes ❑ no ❑

Changed job? yes ❑ no ❑ **If yes, was this a promotion?** yes ❑ no ❑

Changed industry? yes ❑ no ❑

If yes, please give details: _____

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About your apprenticeship / traineeship

Are you an apprentice or a trainee? apprentice ❑ trainee ❑

Name of apprenticeship / traineeship

_____

What is the duration of your training agreement? _____ years _____ months

Have you left your apprenticeship/traineeship at any stage? yes ❑ no ❑

If so, why and for how long?

_____

How long ago did you start your apprenticeship/traineeship? _____ years _____ months

Which of the following best describes your traineeship/apprenticeship? full-time ❑ part-time ❑

Is your training . . . totally on-the-job ❑ totally off-the-job ❑ both on- and off-the-job ❑

If any of your training is off-the-job, who provides the training?

TAFE ❑ private provider ❑

group training company ❑ work-place trainer ❑

other (please specify)

_____

About your experience before you started your apprenticeship/traineeship

Immediately before you entered your apprenticeship / traineeship, were you . . . at school ❑ unemployed ❑ employed ❑

If employed before starting your apprenticeship/traineeship, what was your occupation?

_____

How long were you in this occupation? _____ years _____ months

Did you do any vocational subjects at school? yes ❑ no ❑

If so, what?

_____

Did you do any education/training after leaving school and before starting your apprenticeship/traineeship? yes ❑ no ❑

If so, what?

_____

Factors affecting retention and completion

1. What things do you think are helping you to continue your traineeship / apprenticeship?

Note to interviewers:
Examples of potential responses: family; personal abilities; personal motivation; structural aspects; previous educational background; quality of training in either on- and off-job training; relationship with on- and/or off-job trainers; relationship with work colleagues; learning materials; learning support.
Please probe this question fairly deeply, ending with a question similar to: Which one of these was the most important?

2. What are the difficulties you need to overcome to complete your apprenticeship / traineeship?

Note to interviewers:
Examples of potential responses: family; personal abilities; personal motivation; structural aspects; previous educational background; quality of training in either on- and off-job training; relationship with on- and/or off-job trainers; relationship with work colleagues; learning materials; learning support; finance; geographical location; equity reasons; cultural reasons; boredom; feelings of exploitation.
Please probe this question fairly deeply, ending with a question similar to: Which one of these was the most important?

3. Have you ever thought about not finishing your apprenticeship / traineeship? If so, why? At what stage? What kept you going?

4. During your apprenticeship / traineeship, has anything changed that is making things easier or harder for you to complete?

Note to interviewers:
Examples of potential responses: personal change; program change; employer change; policy change.

5. Do you know others who decided not to complete their apprenticeship / traineeship? Why do you think they didn't finish?

6. What changes would you make to help trainees and apprentices complete?

Note to interviewers:
Examples of potential responses: financial support; learning support; duration; quality of teaching; program change; employer change; policy change

Appendix B: Demographic data on interviewees

Apprentices and trainees currently completing a contract of training

Table 2: Age

	Number of respondents	Percentage
16	18	5.8
17	25	8.0
18	57	18.3
19	50	16.0
20	55	17.6
21	28	9.0
22	22	7.1
23 – 25	21	6.8
26 – 30	14	4.6
31 – 40	14	4.6
41 – 50	7	2.1
51 +	1	0.3
Missing	6	-
Total	318	100

Table 3: Gender

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	155	68.0
Female	73	32.0
Missing	90	-
Total	318	100

Table 4: Highest level of schooling completed

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Year 12	172	54.4
Year 11	60	19.0
Year 10	72	22.8
Year 9 or below	12	3.8
Missing	2	-
Total	318	100

Table 5: Language spoken at home

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Indigenous languages	1	0.3
English	293	93.9
Other	18	5.7
Missing	6	-
Total	318	100

Table 6: Family member employed in the same industry as apprentice/trainee

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	81	25.6
No	236	74.4
Missing	1	-
Total	318	100

Table 7: Sector where apprentice/trainee is employed

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Public	38	12.5
Private	240	78.9
Group Training Scheme	26	8.6
Missing	14	-
Total	318	100

Table 8: Size of current workplace

	Number of respondents	Percentage
< 5 workers	57	18.3
5 – 19 workers	114	36.7
20 – 99 workers	68	21.9
> 100 workers	72	23.2
Missing	7	-
Total	318	100

Table 9: Changed employer during contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	65	20.9
No	246	79.1
Missing	7	-
Total	318	100

Table 10: Changed job during contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	33	10.4
No	285	89.6
Missing	-	-
Total	318	100

Table 11: Change in job a result of a promotion

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	12	3.8
No	21	6.6
Not applicable	285	89.6
Missing	-	-
Total	318	100

Table 12: Changed industry during contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	6	1.9
No	312	98.1
Missing	-	-
Total	318	100

Table 13: Length of contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
12 months	85	27.9
15 months	1	0.3
18 months	2	0.7
24 months	13	4.3
36 months	23	7.5
40 months	2	0.7
41 months	1	0.3
42 months	2	0.7
44 months	2	0.7
48 months	173	56.7
51 months	1	0.3
Missing	13	-
Total	318	100

Table 14: Broken the contract of training for a period of time

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	17	5.5
No	294	94.5
Missing	7	-
Total	318	100

Table 15: When apprenticeship/traineeship commenced

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 12 months ago	148	50.3
12 – 24 months ago	56	21.4
25 – 36 months ago	63	20.1
37 – 48 years ago	22	7.4
More than 48 months	2	0.7
Missing	24	
Total	318	100

Table 16: Mode of apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Full time	300	96.5
Par time	11	3.5
Missing	7	-
Total	318	100

Table 17: Type of training arrangement

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Totally on-the-job	47	15.3
Totally off-the-job	3	1.0
Both on and off-the-job	257	83.7
Missing	11	
Total	318	100

Table 18: Provider of off-the-job training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
TAFE	193	73.7
Group Training Company	28	10.7
Private Provider	37	14.1
Workplace trainer	4	1.5
Not applicable	47	-
Missing	9	-
Total	318	100

Table 19: Activity prior to commencing apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
At school	139	45.1
Unemployed	32	10.4
Employed	137	44.5
Missing	10	-
Total	318	100

Table 20: Taken vocational education subjects at school

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	125	42.7
No	168	57.3
Missing	25	-
Total	318	100

Table 21: Taken education/training before starting the apprenticeship/ traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	120	39.9
No	181	60.1
Missing	17	-
Total	318	100

Apprentices and trainees who have completed their contract of training

Table 22: Age

	Number of respondents	Percentage
18 years	4	12.1
19 years	3	9.1
21 years	2	6.1
22 years	6	18.2
23 years	8	24.2
24 years	3	9.1
25 years	1	3.0
26 years	2	6.1
30 years	1	3.0
31 years or more	3	9.0
Missing	2	-
Total	35	100

Table 23: Gender

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	22	64.7
Female	12	35.3
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 24: Highest level of schooling completed

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Year 12	18	51.4
Year 11	6	17.1
Year 10	10	28.6
Year 9 or below	1	2.9
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 25: Language spoken at home

	Number of respondents	Percentage
English	33	94.3
Other	2	5.7
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 26: Family member employed in the same industry as apprentice/trainee

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	28.6
No	25	71.4
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 27: Currently employed

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	34	97.1
No	1	2.9
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 28: Sector where apprentice/trainee is employed

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Public	4	12.1
Private	29	87.9
Not applicable	1	-
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 29: Size of current workplace

	Number of respondents	Percentage
< 5 workers	6	18.2
5 – 19 workers	12	36.4
20 – 99 workers	5	15.2
> 100 workers	10	30.3
Not applicable	1	-
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 30: Changed employer since completing the contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	9	27.3
No	24	72.7
Not applicable	1	-
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 31: Changed job since completing the contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	14	42.4
No	19	57.6
Not applicable	1	-
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 32: Change in job the result of a promotion

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	71.4
No	4	28.6
Not applicable	19	-
Missing	2	-
Total	35	100

Table 33: Have you changed industry since completing your contract of training?

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	2	6.1
No	30	90.9
Not applicable	1	-
Missing	2	-
Total	35	100

Table 34: Undertaken further training since completing the apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	12	38.7
No	19	61.3
Missing	4	1
Total	35	100

Table 35: Time taken to complete contract of training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
6 months	1	2.9
9 months	2	5.7
10 months	1	2.9
11 months	1	2.9
12 months	12	34.3
14 months	1	2.9
18 months	2	5.7
19 months	1	2.9
36 months	2	5.7
38 months	1	2.9
42 months	3	8.6
48 months	8	22.9
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 36: Left the contract of training for a period of time

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	1	2.9
No	34	97.1
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 37: When completed the apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 12 months ago	20	60.6
12 - 24 months ago	8	24.2
25 - 36 months ago	1	3.0
37 - 48 years ago	2	6.1
More than 48 months	2	6.1
Missing	2	-
Total	35	100

Table 38: Mode of apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Full time	26	76.5
Par time	8	23.5
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 39: Type of training arrangement

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Totally on-the-job	4	11.8
Totally off-the-job	2	5.9
Both on and off-the-job	28	82.4
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 40: Provider of off-the-job training

	Number of respondents	Percentage
TAFE	21	61.8
Group Training Company	4	11.8
Private Provider	4	11.8
Workplace trainer	1	2.9
Not applicable	4	11.8
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 41: Activity prior to commencing apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
At school	10	29.4
Unemployed	3	8.8
Employed	21	61.8
Missing	1	-
Total	35	100

Table 42: Undertook vocational education subjects at school

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	17	48.6
No	18	51.4
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Table 43: Undertook education/training before starting the apprenticeship/traineeship

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	14	40.0
No	21	60.0
Missing	-	-
Total	35	100

Supervisors and managers

Table 44: Current occupation

Name of occupation	Frequency
Builder	2
Business manager / owner	7
Chef	1
Company director	1
Primary producer	1
Employment and training manager	1
Executive director	1
General manager	1
Hairdresser	3
Head of department	1
Maintenance supervisor	2
Manager NA Consultant / Liaison Officer	2
Restaurantuer	1
Salon Coordinator	2
Skills centre manager	1
State administrator	1
Store manager	1
Training and development manager	1
Training centre manager	1
Training manager	1
Training officer	1

Table 45: Size of workplace

	Frequency	Percentage
< 5 workers	11	33.3
5 – 19 workers	9	27.3
20 – 100 workers	2	6.1
> 100 workers	11	33.3
Total	33	100

Teachers and trainers

Table 46: Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	28	54.9
Female	23	45.1
Total	51	100

Table 47: Sector where currently employed

	Frequency	Percentage
Public	38	74.5
Private	10	19.6
Group Training	3	5.9
Total	51	100

Appendix C: Two case studies on workplace supervisors

Fiona Wright

Employer and Supervisor of Apprentices

Lobby Restaurant

Canberra, ACT

02 6273 1563

Fiona currently employs and supervises eight Cooking apprentices and two Waiting trainees. She believes that proper treatment of apprentices is fundamental. Of the 30 apprentices she has supervised over the years, only two have not completed their apprenticeships. Of the 28 who have completed, all except one are still cooking.

Fiona believes that the initial selection of the apprentice is an important factor in their success, and that the apprentice needs to be self-motivated and have the right attitude. She thinks it's important that the employer makes the apprentices aware of what they're getting into, and that after that, it's a matter of treating them with dignity and respect.

> *If the culture in the kitchen is abusive, the victims will become perpetrators themselves.*

Because Fiona says that cooking apprentices themselves identify lack of pay (eg, no penalty rates), no superannuation or workers' compensation, long hours, and lack of respect as reasons for not completing their apprenticeships, she makes sure that her apprentices don't have those complaints.

She ensures that her apprentices are paid correctly, ie all their hours are paid for, they are paid penalty rates, and their TAFE fees are paid. She also ensures that her apprentices are not overworked: they are not given split shifts; they have one day per week at TAFE and two rostered days off each week; she also seeks to give them a maximum of three nights per week and every second weekend off.

Michael Pope

Employer & supervisor of Hairdressing apprentices in NSW

Kinetics Salon, Goulburn, NSW

(02) 4822 4144

Michael and his wife, Amelia, are business partners and joint owners of Kinetics Hairdressing Salon in Goulburn, NSW. They currently employ two apprentices. Michael did his own apprenticeship in Canberra, where he studied at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). He began supervising other apprentices as soon as he graduated, and after working in various salons in Canberra, moved to Goulburn to open his own salon. Michael has been a supervisor and employer of apprentices for some 15 years, and has a remarkable commitment to training.

Michael believes that there are two kinds of people: those who like to serve others, and those who like to be served. He says that hairdressers have to be people who like to serve others, and that in general, it's those who have a passion for hairdressing, rather

than those who see it as a job, who succeed. So important is that passion that Michael says, "When I'm hiring, I hire for attitude rather than aptitude. They have to have the right personality."

Most apprentices find that hairdressing is not as glamorous as they thought it was going to be, and that accounts for those who withdraw within the first three months. When they start, most are also very young. "It's difficult to make decisions about the rest of your life at that age," says Michael.

In an industry where he believes that the average length of stay is only 5 – 5_ years, self-motivation is crucial. Michael's observation is that apprentices seem to do better if they have done Year 12: their reading and writing are better developed, and that's important. However, he says that it's a characteristic of the industry that the people in it tend not to have pursued higher education, and the apprentices are no different. They often haven't developed the motivation to take their own study further.

Peer pressure from their unemployed friends also poses a problem for apprentices. They look at their friends on the dole who aren't working at all, and wonder why they're working odd hours, often in poor conditions, for low wages.

Those conditions can lead to feelings of worthlessness, which Michael sees as being detrimental to the industry. "If they feel like that it results in one of three things: they withdraw, or they get out as soon as they've completed their training, or they go on and perpetuate the cycle by treating someone else (in the future) the way they've been treated."

Michael feels that there needs to be a more regimented system of workplace training:

> *It's not TAFE's fault if there's poor completion. It's much more to do with the attitudes of their supervisors. There's no broad understanding of who's responsible for what. Many supervisors don't even read the literature that the apprentices bring with them from TAFE.*

"I believe that it's my responsibility to finish the training that TAFE begins. However, some employers say, 'They go to TAFE. They should have learned it all.' Some employers are very educationally motivated; others can't be bothered. There ought to be more private providers who are answerable for what they're doing."

"I know when I was a student at CIT (in Canberra) they had an advisory group comprised of industry representatives informing their program design. As far as I know, they don't have anything like that here (in NSW). It does need to be more of a two-way street, with an annual pow-wow where TAFE and industry people get together and discuss the program."

Michael believes that if employers were required to do *Train the Trainer*, and do refresher courses periodically, and if TAFE teachers spent more regular time in industry, or did *Return to Industry* programs, there would be better mutual understanding between the two groups. "Many employers say that what happens at TAFE is gobbledygook to them."

> *I also believe that one day at TAFE a week as well as block release would improve the apprenticeship program. It would give the learning more continuity, and provide camaraderie for the apprentices.*

Finally, Michael is breaking down the traditional workplace hierarchies so prevalent elsewhere in the hairdressing profession. He believes that regardless of being one of the salon owners, he should do his share of the salon's work, just as he expects his apprentices to do. "We have a cleaning roster in our shop, and I'm on it. I clean the toilet."

Appendix D: Submission from an apprentice

To whom it may concern

I have decided to write this letter to assist you with your survey, as tonight is my only night off over a straight two-week period.

I decided to take up the trade as an apprentice chef full time three years ago. I am originally from the NSW town of _____. I wanted to take up the physical and emotional challenge when I was 16. On advice from those around me, I completed my Year 12 certificate and I set my sights on beginning an apprenticeship when I moved to a larger town or even the city (where there would be more opportunity).

I then made the decision to move to [name of capital city]. I have always had the desire to be a chef. I have also known that to achieve this there would have to be sacrifices made along the way. Prior to taking up the challenge I sat down and assessed the situation. I made a list of positive and negative aspects. I have outlined them below.

Positive

- I will have a trade behind me and should always be able to find a job.
- I will be a 'tradesperson'.
- I will be on an average wage.
- I may gain respect when somebody asks me 'What do you do?' I can be proud when I answer them and say a Chef.
- I should be able to impress people and cook nice meals for them and have somebody appreciate the skills I have gained over the years
- I would have a stable job to stick to and have some direction in life (for at least four years anyway).
- I looked at [name of TAFE institute] as a place where I may be able to make friends in the new city.

Negative

- I will only be on about $160 per week for the first year.
- The hours will be a challenge
- I will not be able to go out with my friends on weekends or for that matter at night time.
- I will have split shifts, so I will spend a fair bit of cash on petrol, driving to and from work. (Money I won't have in my first year).
- I will have to spend a great deal of money on knives and equipment and uniforms and fees just to get started (more money I won't have spare).
- Things will be tough trying to register and insure my car for three years at least.
- I may get one day off on Monday and one day off on Wednesday so I won't be able to travel down to the coast to my parents' place (until holidays anyway).

At this point of my apprenticeship I would, looking back, not have taken the path of a chef in training. As you can see by the above lists, I have made the necessary sacrifices to succeed. However, I was not aware that after the initial training period, apprentices are regularly exploited and made to work doing qualified chef duties, unsupervised. I now know that this is a common problem in this industry.

There needs to be more policy implemented to ensure that such exploitation does not occur. I am endeavouring to continue, and to receive my qualification, but at the same time I am aware of the perfectly valid reasons why people get disillusioned and leave.

The fact that I am being openly exploited is humiliating and degrading and businesses who make this their practice should be ashamed of themselves and penalised. I am appalled that the legislation does not contain standards that protect people who are genuinely trying to realise a dream.

I have lost a lot of weight due to the constant sight of food and the hours that I do get to eat. A usual Saturday night (when I should be out having fun with my friends) I get home at 10 pm, eat, then collapse into bed, say hello to my partner (as my head hits the pillow) seconds later fall asleep, then jump up at day break and fly into work to do breakfast and a split shift, only to return to work Sunday night.

It may sound as though I am having a cry about my chosen career but if anybody asks me for advice if they should be a chef, I tell them to decide ASAP (they shouldn't) waste three years of their life and then decide that it isn't for them.

Written submission by a third year cooking apprentice.

This is one in a series of publications on apprenticeships, now available in print and on the internet. Published by NCVER, these cover facts and figures on the current vital issues for Australian apprenticeships.

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